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ARN SABA
A CONVERSATION WITH THE CREATOR OF NEIL THE HORSE!

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DAVID ANTHONY KRAFT'S COMICS

inTERVIEW

SPECIAL EDITION

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UP FRONT

"The Art of Conversation"

One of life's rare pleasures is good conversation—and what a pleasure it can be! Especially when it's on subjects near and dear to our hearts, subjects of specialized personal interests such as, in our case – comics.

Discussions about the skills of good writing and drawing, what constitutes good comics, the many and varied influences at play upon different folks in different places working in the same field at the same time...these are not topics likely to come up often in the course of common conversation. That is, unless you count yourself among the fortunate few who spend their lives doing comics for a living. And even then, the disciplines involved in doing creative work call for a high degree of solitude, so the opportunities to engage in a meaningful exchange of ideas with fellow creators can be few and far between for some.

A couple years ago, in the first issue of this magazine, I mentioned how much I enjoy good talk. This issue of COMICS INTERVIEW is especially rich in good conversation. Whether or not you care for the comics work of the folks interviewed here, I think you'll find a wealth of insight and intelligence in what they have to say – and some mighty fine conversation.

~Dave

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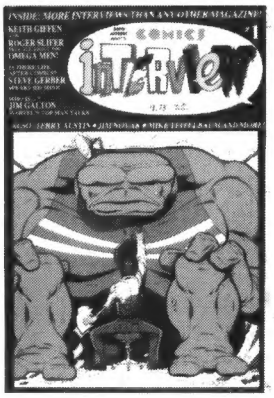
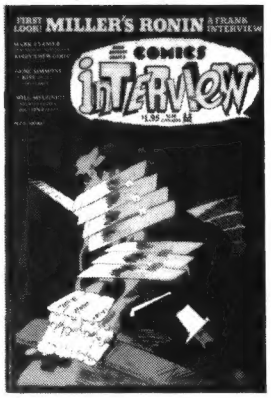


#1-$3.00 **Keith Giffen** on the making of THE OMEGA MEN — **Steve Gerber** speaks out on comics — X-MEN inker **Terry Austin** talks — Marvel's top man, **Jim Galton,** tells all — and much more in this premiere issue!



#2-$3.00 **Miller** raps about RONIN — **Mark** [illegible] shares secrets of **Kirby's** [illegible] — **Steve Gerber** asks [illegible] about DNA-GENTS — **Gene Simmons** of KISS on comics — [illegible]! Cover by **Frank Miller.**

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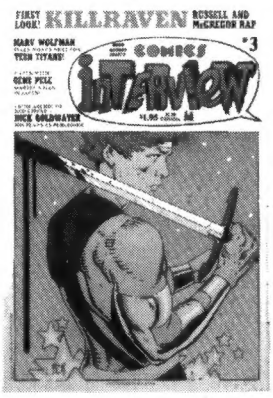

#3-$3.00 **Don McGregor** & **Craig Russell** on [illegible]RAVEN — Origins of NEW TEEN TITANS told by **Marv Wolfman** & **Howard Chaykin** on AMERICAN FLAGG — French comics by **Neal Adams** — Cover by **Russell.**

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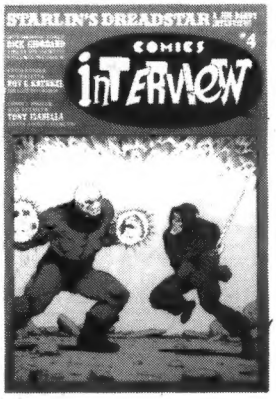

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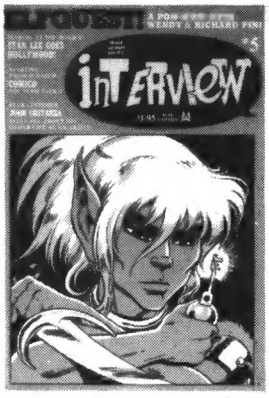

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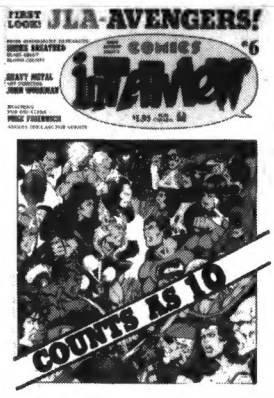
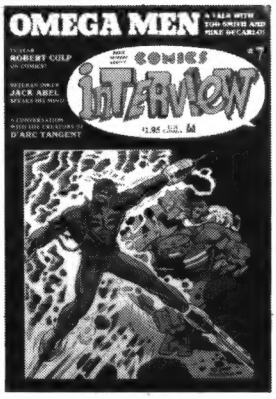


#6-$20.00 **George Perez** & **Roy Thomas** tell all about JLA/AVENGERS feud — inside ELF-QUEST, part 2 — **Berke Breathed** blabs about BLOOM COUNTY — more! Awesome cover by **Perez!**



#7-$3.00 Artist **Tod Smith** — inker **Mike De[illegible]** too — D'ARC TANGENT [illegible]tar **Robert Culp** talks ab[illegible] — Marvel artist **Jack Abel** [illegible] MEN cover by **Smith & DeCarlo.**

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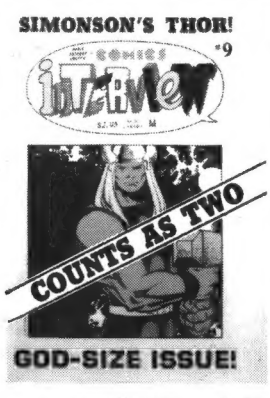
#8-$3.00 **Mike Baron** and **Steve Grant** discuss NEXUS, WHISPER and BADGER — **Bill Griffith** talks about ZIPPY THE PINHEAD — **Richard Burton** on British comics — plus more! Cover by **Steve Rude.**



#9-$5.00 GOD-SIZE ISSUE **Walt Simonson** [illegible]he man and his art — grand [illegible]e **Kubert** gabs — A walk [illegible]inory lane with comics gia[illegible]ner **Fox** — much, much more![illegible]HOR cover by **Simonson,**

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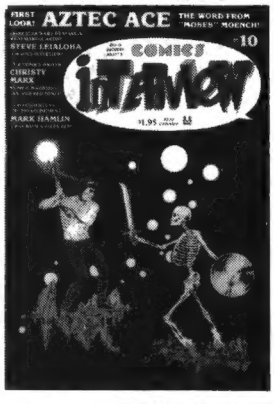
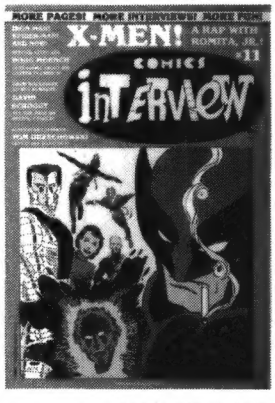


#10-$3.00 **Doug Moench** on his SF series — from **Starlin** to STAR WARS, a wacky interview with **Steve Leialoha** — **Christy Marx** on women, sex and RED SONJA — more! ACE cover by **Hernandez & Yeates.**



#11-$3.00 **John Romita Jr.** talks about Ma[illegible] IRON MAN to X-MEN — [illegible]ench (part two) on his st[illegible]er and the state of comics [illegible]de Pacific Comics — more! X-MEN cover by **Romita!**

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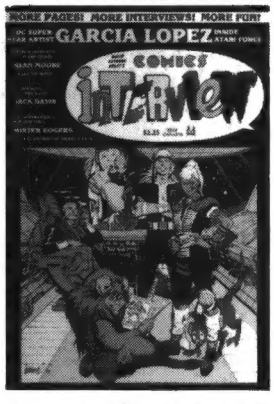

#12-$3.00 DC artist **Jose Luis Garcia Lopez** (TEEN TITANS, ATARI FORCE) — EC artist **Jack Davis** — TV's **Mr. Rogers** — star scripter **Alan Moore** talks about superheroes — **Louise Simonson** — more!

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"The NEIL world flops back and forth between funny animals and funny people."

Photo: Mark Shainblum

ARN SABA

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Arn Saba

Residence: Toronto, Canada (under protest)

Born: 1947, Vancouver, Canada

Occupation: Writer/Cartoonist (this year). Next year: who knows?

Favorite Activities: Thinking up new story ideas; enjoying the outdoors; travel; playing with radios, tape recorders, and cameras (not necessarily all at once); browsing in bookstores; Theatre!

Least Favorite Activities: Having to do the work behind those new story ideas; washing dishes; going to parties; doing anything I've already done before!

Cartoon Influences: Walt Disney!; Carl Barks, Milton Caniff, Hal Foster; and the great Sunday comics of earlier in this century, in general.

Currently Admire: LOVE AND ROCKETS; the new stuff by Eisner; the work of Harvey Pekar; and anything by Trina Robbins.

Other Influences: Fred Astair; the history of American popular song, from 1850 to present; Musical Comedy.

Favorite Place: California! — especially Santa Barbara and San Francisco.

Most Hated Places: New York, Mexico City, Naples — anywhere with too many people!

Uncontrollable Weaknesses: Electronic gadgets (especially when miniaturized); sugar; anything to do with Disney; expensive art books.

Who Would You Like To Be? Fred Astair or Donald Duck.

Favorite Music: New dance music; R & B; New Wave; Swing; Musical Theater.

Secret Ambition: To be a career diplomat.

Most Concerned With: Understaning the dark side of human nature; wondering how we can learn to overcome it. I would also like to lose 15 pounds.

Most Thankful For: Health; being born in North America; family; my many wonderful friends; and above all, my girlfriend, Pam.

Worst Habit: Nagging Pam.

"I think that super-heroes are really

A horse, you say? An anthropomorphic doll? A talking cat?

No, no, that's all wrong. You'd never get a comic book published today with characters like that (unless the talking cat slinks around lots of pretty women in sexy lingerie). It's impossible! Where are the skin-tight costumes, the flashing powerbeams, the demonic, cackling supervillains? A comic like that is doomed before it starts.

In fact, Arn Saba's NEIL THE HORSE (featuring a horse — Neil — a talking cat — Soapy — and an anthropomorphic doll — Mam'selle Poupee) is a respected member of Aardvark-Vanaheim's megalithic publishing empire (which also includes CEREBUS, normalman, MS. TREE and others). Arn himself is witty, articulate, intelligent, and opinionated as all hell about this comics industry we all love. Possessing the rare ability to be softspoken and outspoken at the same time, Arn opened up about his characters, his background, his philosophy of comics and his sense of the history of the medium when he was cornered by Mark Shainblum, Gabriel Morrissette and Pierre Fournier at MapleCon 6, Ottawa's giant sf/comics/media convention held on the campus of Carleton University...

DON'T TLY STLANGE MELICAN WORDS! — YOU NO CAN SLIDE OUT FROM THIS!
WHO'S TRYIN' TO SLIDE OUT! — DO YOU THINK I HAD MY PRIVATE OGRES GOBBLE UP THAT ADVANCE GUARD?
DON'T KNOW WHAT- BUT IS TLAP! — YOU MARCH AHEAD! IF IS AMBUSH YOU FIRST ONE SHOT!
Milton Caniff

Milton Caniff's TERRY & THE PIRATES, circa '36-'37.

MARK SHAINBLUM: *Let's start off controversially — why a horse and not radioactive mutant ninjas?* (Laughter.)

ARN SABA: O gee! That really connects to something we said before the tape recorder got turned on, so I want to go back to the statement that I love making, which is that I don't think that I've ever read a single super-hero comic all the way through.

MARK: *That's remarkable, for someone in the field.*

ARN: I don't think it is. I don't think that it's remarkable at all. It may be remarkable for today, but I was born in 1947, so I grew up in the 1950s, reading Dell Comics — UNCLE SCROOGE and all the **Barks** stuff. **Barks** is my great hero, obviously. And reading all the funny-animal stuff from the 1950s — THE FOX AND THE CROW, and all the DC stuff, and also reading **Milton Caniff**. My mother had a collection, which she cut out when she was a kid, of **Milton Caniff**'s TERRY AND THE PIRATES strip, from the 1930s, and I became very interested in newspaper strips. But I never really got into super-heroes at all. I found them really boring when I was a kid, and to this day I have nothing but contempt for them. *(Laughter.)* I'm not impressed. It's a gigantic mistake for people to think that they are the bulk of the field. If you look at the history of comics — the comic-strip medium, actually — it started in 1895 with newspaper strips —

MARK: *THE YELLOW KID.*

ARN: THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS. I love all those old strips. I have a big col-

"The Girl He Left Behind" from MOON MULLINS by Frank Willard, 1930.

SAY-EGYPT, I GUESS I OWE YOU A APOLOGY. BUT I LEARNED MY LESSON AND I'M GONNA CUT OUT MY WILD WAYS AND SETTLE DOWN - WHAT DO YOU SAY TO I AND YOU GETTIN' MARRIED?
JUST THE SAME THING I TOLD YOU LAST NIGHT. NO!
OH - WAS THAT YOU?
?
Reg. U. S. Pat. Off., Copyright, 1930, by The Chicago Tribune

© 1985 The Chicago Tribune Syndicate

1985 Milton Caniff & Field Enterprises, Inc

killing the comics as an art form."

© 1985 Arn Saba

lection of strips, pre-World War II — the big beautiful Sunday funny-pages. I've got thousands of those things. But, to me, that is the history of comics, and in some ways, the height of comics. The best comics have ever been. They were more adult, more intelligent, better printed, better color, better distributed and more popular at that time than they ever have been since. So I think that super-heroes in comics are a cancerous tumor coming into the field *(laughter)* — I not joking! They're really killing the comics as an art form, and the sooner super-heroes can be cut out and destroyed, the better.

MARK: *Nothing like understatement.* (Laughter.) *What are your favourite comics books? Your influences?*

ARN: My influences were in the past — the ones I just mentioned: **Carl Barks** and **Milton Caniff**. They're the two absolute tops. And then anything to do with the **Disney** studios. We're not talking about comics but animation. I really admire **Disney** as a man and also his work. Then, in later years, things I've come to admire a lot are PRINCE VALIANT, FELIX THE CAT —

MARK: *Yes, I noticed a trace of Felix.*

ARN: Oh, in the strip. Very definitely. **Floyd Gottfredson**'s work in the 1930s — this is all stuff I saw when I was an adult — all the old strips from before the Second World War. BRINGING UP FATHER, MOON MULLINS, POLLY AND HER PALS. Those are probably my favorites. When I was a kid, I was totally absorbed by the **Disney** studios.

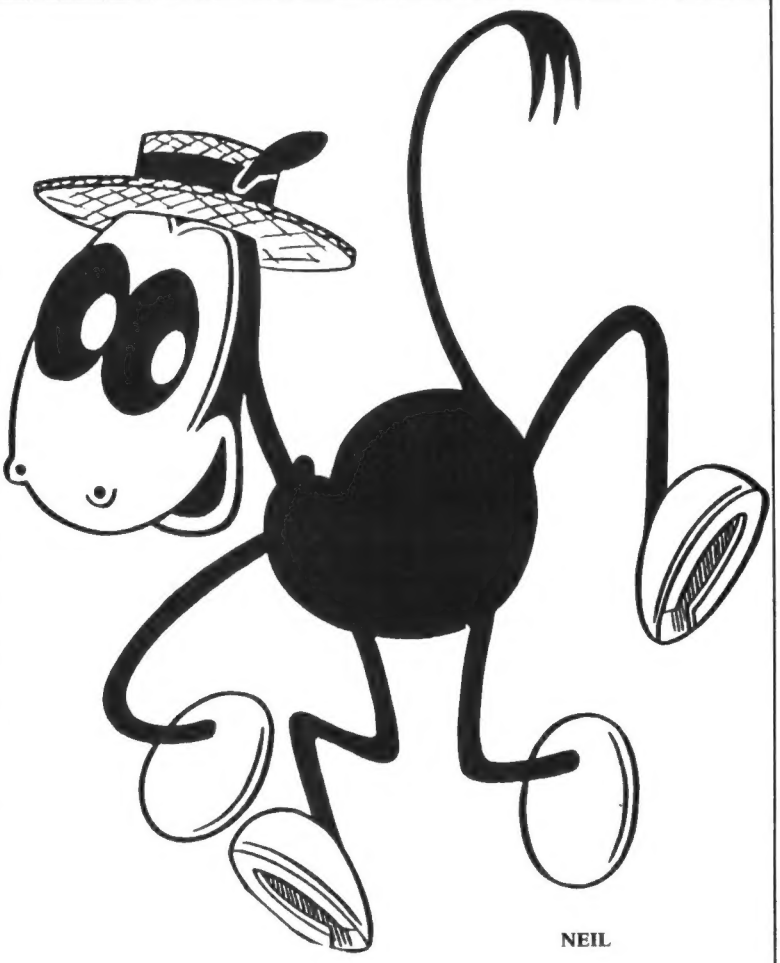
MARK: *I really loved those Disney books, too.*

ARN: And also the animation. I read a *lot* of comics when I was a kid. And also children's books. RUPERT THE BEAR was a big influence on me. It was an English children's series, sort of semi-comics. And all the great children's series that were around — FREDDY THE PIG, I loved FREDDY THE PIG — also DOCTOR DOLITTLE and the OZ books. Children's books were a big influence on me. And another big influence was musical comedy.

MARK: *Oh, yeah.*

ARN: I have as much interest in musicals as I do in comics, actually. For a long time I was torn between working in the theatre and working in comics. And I am still torn. I still have potential — contacts and friends and so forth — to write some shows and get them on the stage, at least in Toronto if not elsewhere. But I don't have time. I'm really concentrating on comics now.

MARK: *Well, that leads to a question I've been meaning to ask you. I notice you have integrated musical comedy into NEIL THE HORSE to a great extent. How do you think that works in a silent medium such as comics?*



NEIL

ARN: The challenge, of course, is to make the reader feel that it is not silent. That actual music and dancing are happening. And I don't know if I've succeeded as much as I'd like to. I certainly have tried. I couldn't resist doing it. The only way I could get myself interested in comics was if I could bring in all my other interests, because otherwise I knew I'd be frustrated. Because I knew I wanted to do musicals — I *have* done musicals — and I would have always been yearning after that, if I were not — I decided, "Well, I may as well just put everything in here that I like." And it's never really scared me, that I thought it might be too weird. I thought, "Well, that's okay. I know what I want to do." I don't have any idea that comics *should* be anything in particular. Comics should be whatever you want. The challenge is, does it work or not?

MARK: *Would you be interested in putting something like a flexi-disc in the comic, with music on it?*

ARN: I'd love to, as a gimmick. The thing is, it doesn't enhance the comic, as an art form itself, but yeah, that's a fun thing. I'd like them to hear my songs. I did have a NEIL THE HORSE musical on the radio, a couple of years ago, and that was a big thrill for me. It was the first time my songs really got performed in public. But I would love a disc with the characters singing the songs. And we probably will do that, sooner or later. It's more a matter of, "How many projects can I do at once?" *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Your credits? Anything before NEIL THE HORSE?*

ART: I did NEIL THE HORSE as a comic strip, too, of course.

GABRIEL MORRISSETTE: *Yeah, I saw it had a syndicate name but I wasn't familiar with the syndicate.*

ARN: A small Canadian syndicate. A friend and I actually ran it, but we lost thousands of dollars and decided, "That was enough of that." I published a couple of collections of stories that I illustrated.

MARK: *Children's?*

ARN: No, the same kind of weird mix that I've always done. Is it for children or is it

"Comics should be whatever you want."

for adults? I don't know. But I did publish — self-publish — a couple of books in the early Seventies that I made some money off, and had some comics in them. I was always sort of hankering to do comics, rather than actually doing them. I did a strip at the University of British Columbia. It was funny — I went to the university for a year, and then dropped out for a year to take a trip to Europe, and kept sending the strip in, three times a week, even from Europe. And then I went back to the university, and then dropped out for good, but kept on doing the comic strip. I didn't tell anybody I had dropped out so I could keep getting published. *(Laughter.)* So for four years I had this strip, which was a character call MORALMAN, a non-super-hero — super-hero with no super-powers whatsoever, but thought he did. He'd go around telling people what to do and constantly get himself into giant disasters.

MARK: *Your editorial comment on the super-hero?*

ARN: Yeah. It seems impossible for me to handle the subject without making fun of it. Because now I'm doing a take-off on Conan, called "Canine the Barbarian," and it's Conan with a black dog's nose.

MARK: *Conan is a character who never appealed to me very much.*

ARN: Well, I actually enjoyed CONAN. He's sort of an exception, although he's not really a super-hero. I did enjoy the early **Roy Thomas** books. But I just seem unable to touch these macho fantasies without wanting to destroy them. My "Canine" character is sure that what's going on around him is a giant adventure which should be solved with brawn and shouting and mayhem, and all the other characters are just getting along fine without this. So this reflects the current attitude, I guess, that I have toward this — finally getting back at the schoolyard bullies. Revenge after all these years!

MARK: *That is a common thread running through comic-book people.*

ARN: We were all the nerds. Exactly! Now we're going to draw all those people who used to bother us when we were kids!

MARK: *I understand Leo Bachle — who drew JOHNNY CANUCK in the 1940s — used to draw all his enemies from school as the Nazis in JOHNNY CANUCK. He was in high school at the time.* (Laughter.) *How's that for revenge?*

ARN: That's wonderful! I've never done anything like that, anything that specific, but I think to an extent any adult comic-book story is, in a way, kind of looking back over your shoulder at everybody you didn't like when you were a kid and saying, "Look — see, I told you so!"

MARK: *Exactly.*

ARN: When I was doing CBC radio, with a national audience, I knew that my relatives in Vancouver knew that I was on it, if they didn't actually hear me. And I had a set of cousins and aunts —

MARK: *Was that AM or FM?*

ARN: AM, mostly. I had a set of relatives who I didn't really like and who I used to feel were putting me down, as a kid, so I always felt, "Nyahh, Nyahh! I'm on the radio!" So here I was, a relatively serious professional broadcaster, and I was thinking to myself, "Nyahh, nyahh!" *(Laughter.)* It's really silly how much we are children underneath.

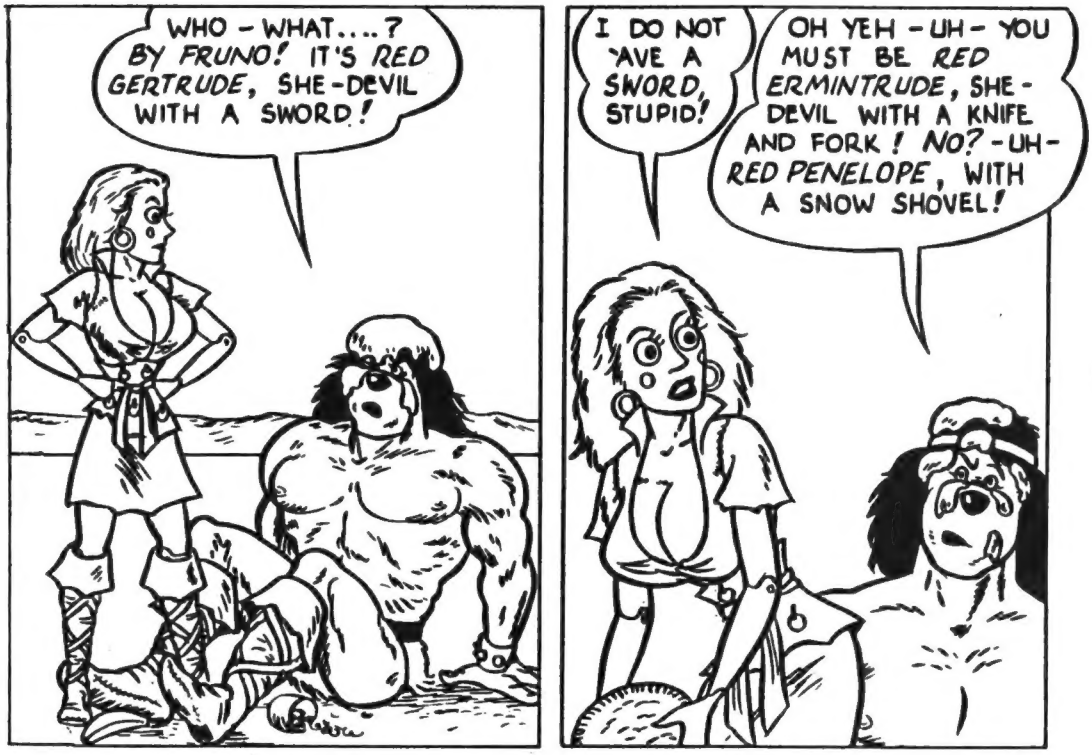
MARK: *Everyone in this business is, more or less.*

ARN: Well, that's one of the delightful things about this business. We get to be children again.

MARK: *That's another thing that runs through NEIL. In this day and age, when you have these really cynical and downright vicious books coming out, NEIL has sort of this charming innocence to it in many ways. It's a very innocent book in many ways.*

ARN: Well, thank you. Partly natural and partly calculated. I didn't think about it at

Canine the Barbarian meets Mam'selle Poupee, from NEIL THE HORSE 9.


WHO - WHAT....?
BY FRUNO! IT'S RED GERTRUDE, SHE-DEVIL WITH A SWORD!
I DO NOT 'AVE A SWORD, STUPID!
OH YEH - UH - YOU MUST BE RED ERMINTRUDE, SHE-DEVIL WITH A KNIFE AND FORK! NO? - UH - RED PENELOPE, WITH A SNOW SHOVEL!

1985 Arn Saba

"The adult theme is under the surface."

© 1985 Walt Disney Productions

first. The calculation has come into it now because of people telling me about it, and I can't help but be self-aware and self-conscious, and in a way, it's too bad. I don't like that. I don't like being told too much about what I'm doing because then I become artificial.

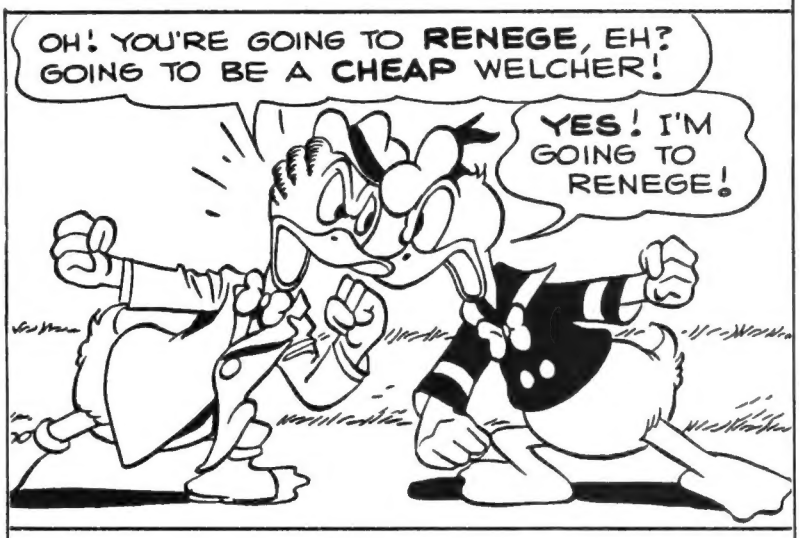
MARK: *I'm not saying that your work is in any way without meaning, because I remember a story you wrote about the suction cups on the feet, where the characters were running across the roof-tops, and there were neat little swipes at the military and official bilingualism and everything else all throughout the story. It was really neat. I notice that it takes place in a funny-animal Canada, which is really unique.*

ARN: The NEIL world flops back and forth between funny animals and funny people, almost at will. Depending on what I feel like when I'm doing the story. Sometimes it's funny animals, and sometimes it's funny people. But, yeah, I try — I hope it's true — that my stories have something to them besides light entertainment. But one doesn't like to bludgeon the reader over the head with, "Here is the moral," or even necessarily with a satirical point, like that one you're referring to. I think that's a rare story for me. I usually try to have a real good adventure or love story or comedy, whatever it is, that by its underlying — by the assumptions of the story, by the way the premise is constructed and by the way the characters interact — if one chose to look beneath the surface at what morals are at work or what social assumptions are at work, that would be where the point is. I would hope the moral or the satirical point or whatever it was — the adult theme — is under the surface, because on the surface I want it to be amusing and easy to read for kids — I don't know if I've succeeded as well as I like — I don't think I have — but that, of course, is the same as with **Barks**. That's what we adults see in **Barks**. There are times when I find him as good a writer as **Mark Twain** or **Jonathan Swift**. I'm sure **Barks** will live in history as one of the immortal writers of comedy.

MARK: *When I was a kid, I wasn't aware of who he was, of course — but I used to love the UNCLE SCROOGE stories tremendously.*

ARN: The point is that I try to emulate **Barks**, as one always tries to emulate one's heroes. I'm always delighted when a kid — six years old, eight years old, whatever — likes my work. I've even heard of two-year-olds who like just the image of Neil — they just like the way Neil looks.

GABRIEL: *Speaking of the image, when I saw Neil, I thought he was sort of similar to the early Mickey Mouse, a really bold, graphic kind of style, which Ub Iwerks developed at the Disney Studios. And I wonder if Neil isn't the spiritual child of Harry Horsecollar.*



ARN: Oh, Horace Horsecollar? Right. Well, actually I didn't think very much about Horace Horsecollar when I was developing Neil. The only thought I gave to Horace was to make sure Neil didn't look like him very much. But Neil really is — not in personality, but in design — what Mickey Mouse would be like if Mickey Mouse were a horse.

MARK: *The original Mickey Mouse.*

ARN: The original Mickey Mouse. He's got that line, that same black mask, this is totally deliberate. That white face with the mask with three points and the inner line that the early, early Mickey had, and Neil even when he started had the same pie-cut eyes, and he's got the big feet like Mickey's feet as shoes. It's a total rip-off. *(Laughter.)* I tried, for the first year or so, to make my work look as close as possible to **Gottfredson**'s work. In 1933 or so he was doing his greatest stuff. But I soon learned it was not my style. One learns as one goes on that one can't be someone else. It's pointless. I just found other influences crowding into my brain, that I wanted to bring out. And now it's evolving into whatever it is. I don't know what it is now. Neil is the holdover in the strip. Neil still looks like that, although the others have changed. What I wanted to do is be **Floyd Gottfredson** in 1933. If I couldn't be **Disney** in 1933, I wanted to be **Floyd Gottfredson** in 1933. I was trying to will myself back in time!

GABRIEL: *A similar example is Dave Sim. He was doing Barry Smith, and then became Dave Sim.*

Donald Duck -- by Carl Barks, of course.

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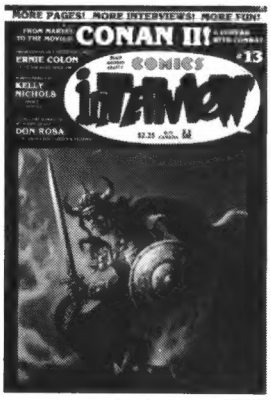

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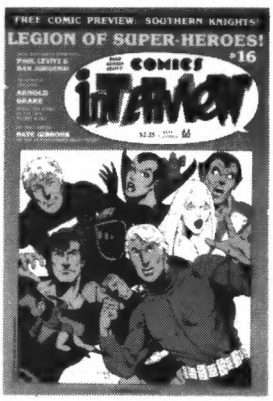

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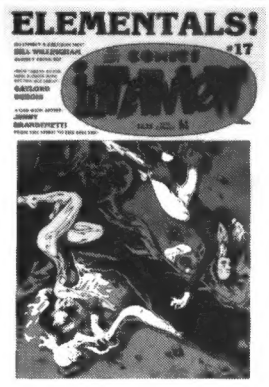

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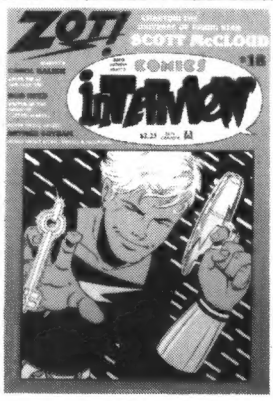

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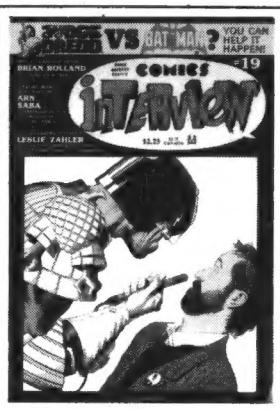

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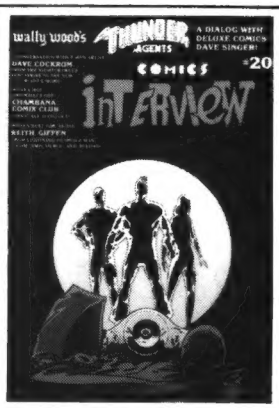

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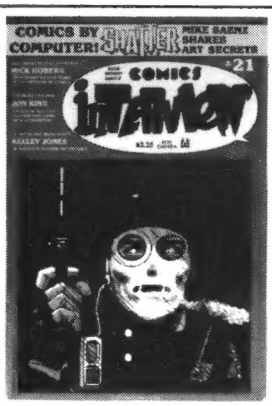

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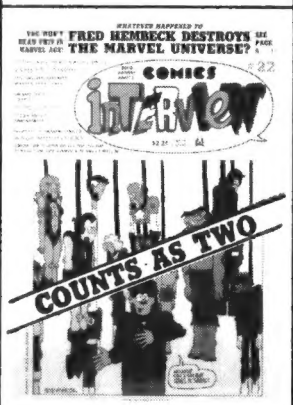

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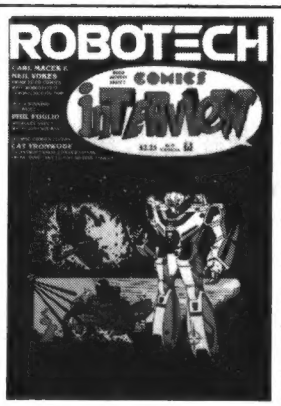

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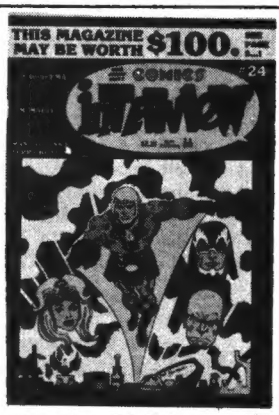

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"Neil, of course, provides naivete."

ARN: And apparently I'm **Arn Saba** now. *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *The Barks influence in your work is not so evident to me — at least in terms of the plotting — because, even though his characters were ducks, he used straight, linear plots, and you don't. You don't seem to use linear storytelling.*

ARN: I do and I don't. It depends upon the story. I don't know if you read the long, four-part "Video Warriors" story.

MARK: *I missed that one.*

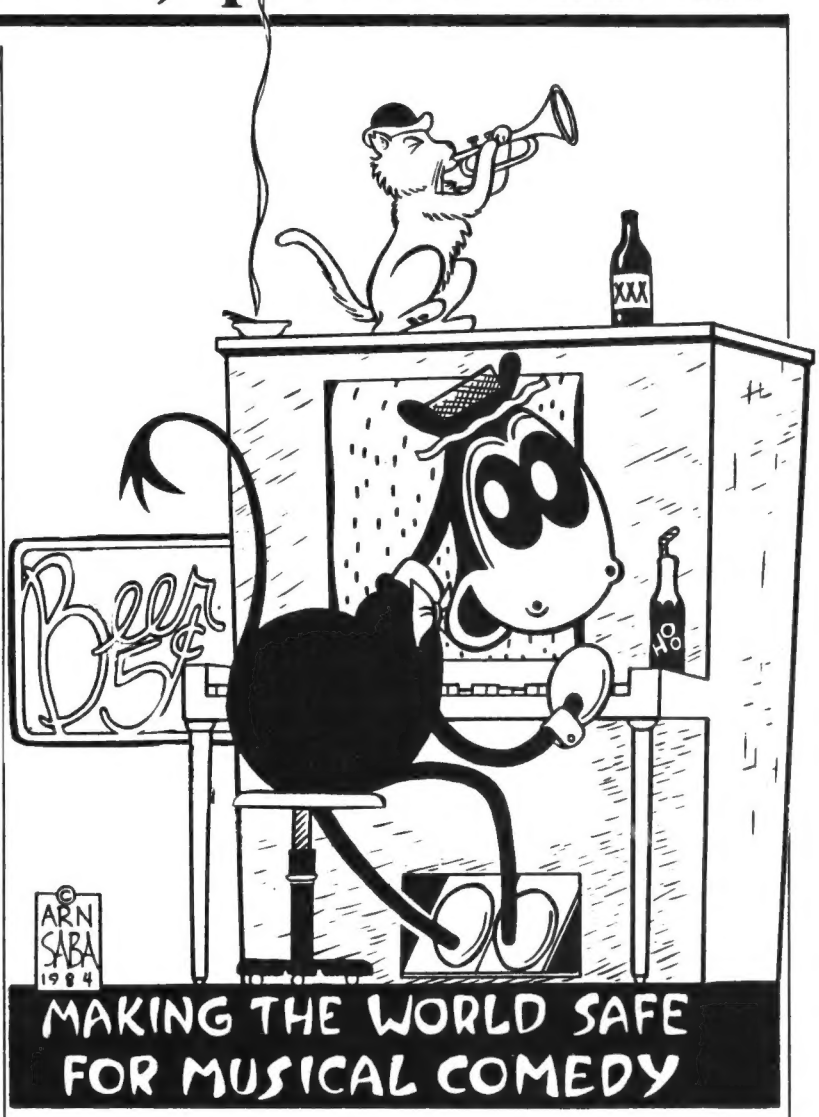
ARN: Missed it? It was four issues! *(Laughter.)* That one, I think, you'd find, is the closest to **Barks** I've done yet, except for the play, which you haven't heard. The NEIL THE HORSE radio play —

MARK: *Has that been recorded?*

ARN: It was broadcast on the CBC, but not released commercially. We are putting it out, but we're waiting until Hell freezes over. *(Laughter.)*

PIERRE FOURNIER: *But we're in Canada.*

ARN: Right — where Hell freezes over regularly. *(Laughter.)* But those two stories — the "Video Warriors" and the play — are the two most like **Barks**. Obviously there are differences, and I'm not even saying that I'm trying to be like **Barks**, but I think you'll find that they're closer to **Barks**. I know I sometimes do pretty surrealistic stories. But these are adventures with a beginning, middle and an end, and conflict — but **Barks** is much more economical in his storytelling. He's simpler, without being simplistic. He's really right on the mark, in terms of getting the story; moving and telling the story; and keeping it moving — and in a very direct way, keeping it funny. One of my burdens as a storyteller is that I have three main characters, and for a long time I fought against that and didn't want to have that many, because what it means is that you have to take into account all three of them, always. With Donald Duck, Uncle Scrooge and the three boys, they were basically alike enough in personality that they could have a unified kind of motivation in the story. They didn't have to — he didn't have to account for three different reasons for doing the same thing. But in every case in my story, the three different characters are completely different in why they would want to do something. So, it does tend to make the stories more cumbersome. I'm trying to keep my stories streamlined, like **Barks'**, or like **Caniff**'s beautiful TERRY AND THE PIRATES in the 1930s. It was just slam-bang adventure all the time, but with good characterization. That's still the ideal thing. One of my ideals is just to keep it moving.



MARK: *I'm curious — you have three characters: a talking horse, a cat who smokes a cigar, and an anthropomorphic doll. Where did they come from?*

ARN: The very, very first NEIL strip I drew showed an old farm-couple who received a mysterious big crate in the mail — I don't know how it could have come through the mail, it was giant, seven feet tall — and they weren't expecting this, and they opened it up, and Neil jumped out, and proceeded to eat everything in the house, and then ran away. So that's the origin of NEIL THE HORSE. But in terms of where I got the idea for it, there really is no answer, "Well, I sat down and designed it because of this, this and this." It's more that it came out of my subconscious. I was looking around for characters to do, and I decided, in late 1974, that I was going to get serious about doing comics.I started to look back at the old strips that I am always referring to, BRINGING UP FATHER and THE KATZENJAMMER KIDS and others like that, and I realized that what was necessary was characters that were very strong in their personalities but were not tied to their situation. For example, I had previously come up with a strip that was current at that time called GRAND HOTEL that was about a co-operative house.

MARK: *Where did that appear?*

ARN: It was never published. But I worked on it for a while. It was about a bunch of hippies living in a co-op house, and it was at the point that the hippie movement was dying out. It was a comedy, sort of like MOON MULLINS. Their confusion about their identity in this changing society — in a very light-hearted way it was social satire. But I realized that unless I was going

"I don't know whether I'll keep doing

to delve into fantasy, which is really what I was more inclined to do, I was really tied to those characters. It was not universal enough. I was looking for characters who could go anywhere, be anything, do anything, without losing their personalities.

MARK: *GARFIELD is tied to being an orange cat in a house with a funny dog and all that stuff, and that's about it.*

ARN: Precisely. That's one of the most limiting concepts you could imagine. It's not likely that Garfield is suddenly going to take a trip to the moon and encounter a bunch of aliens or something —

MARK: *That's exactly what happens in one of the children's storybooks.*

ARN: Well, you would almost have to do it in a children's storybook. I was walking down the street one day, after thinking about this for months, and suddenly Neil and Soapy popped into my head. Bang! There they were! In a thought balloon over my head. How they looked, their personalities — everything. Poupee came along the same way, about three or four years later. Just walked into the strip — literally, just walked into it — and never away. I thought, "Mam'selle Poupee — what a great name! What a great character!" It was just amazing. It was partly by evolution and partly by planning, but I managed to work it out that the characters were universal, or what I hoped is "universal," in the sense that they represent types, and I think that with those three, I have a pretty broad range of types. I have Neil, the child, basically; Soapy, the cynical, worldly wise adult; and Poupee, not innocent, but hopeful — the adult who still wants to achieve and strive for things, and therefore can be disappointed, where Soapy knows everything. He's been there, he's seen it, you can't fool him or surprise him. He's totally competent. He supplies good counterbalance to the other two. Neil, of course, provides naivete. He's the Candide character who asks questions and reveals the folly of the wise man. Even so, I don't like to get too heavy with that. I always like to pull back from bludgeoning anything. I think that at least for now it provides a pretty wide range of situations for me. They can go different places all the time.

MARK: *And meet new friends.*

ARN: And now with Canine in the Hyborian Age —

GABRIEL: *You don't explain how? He's just there?*

ARN: I thought about that a long time. Whether there should be an explanation. **Barks** kept his characters in the twentieth century, and if they went to some other time or place, they would always go by some device.

MARK: *Yeah, but Donald Duck in one episode would be a security guard and in another episode he'd be sitting at home at a desk. Barks never bothered with continuity–*

ARN: In terms of the jobs, but he didn't put them in different centuries. I thought about that and thought, "What the heck, it's just a fantasy anyway."

I don't know if I've gone where I'd like to go, so far, with NEIL, as far as the universality of the characters. But I keep trying to do that, and I don't know whether I'll keep doing Neil and Mam'selle Poupee all my life. I love the characters but I have other characters I'd like to do as well. Whether or not I'd like to keep doing those same three at the same time... There are sort of two ways you can go as a cartoonist — you can either be continually turning out new characters and concepts, or else you can get one set of characters and mine that for all they're worth. For better or worse, I seem to be in that second category, although I do have ideas for other characters and other types of stories..

MARK: *Well, your format is so flexible, if you ever had another character you could run it as a backup feature or whatever.*

ARN: You mean in the format of a comic book?

MARK: *Yeah.*

ARN: Oh, I have other comics that I want to do that are entirely different in concept. f I have a concept for one that's a PRINCE VALIANT type of adventure, a realistic, medieval or Renaissance period.

MARK: *Do you have a realistic style as well?*

ARN: No, I'd have to have someone else draw that. But I could lay it out and write it. Oh, I have grandiose schemes for having minions. *(Laughter.)*

(Gabriel waves his hand enthusiastically.)

MARK: (to Gabriel) *You want to be a minion...*

GABRIEL: *I'm already yours.* (Laughter.)

ARN: Everybody needs a minion.

MARK: *You worked for CBC?*

ARN: I was a freelancer for a number of years. I should explain for those who don't know what it is — I always tell Americans that it's the equivalent of the BBC, which they seem to know about. The CBC is the government-owned, but not government-controlled, national radio and TV network.

MARK: *Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.*

ARN: That's right. At times it can be amazingly *avant garde* and liberal and sort of wonderful, and at times it can be stultifying and boring and hidebound, especially when you work there.

MARK: *Based in Toronto?*

ARN: It was the national network but based in Toronto, and I was mainly talking about comics. I started out going on air, being interviewed by other people talking about comics, and gradually I got to the point

NEIL the HORSE
I CAN'T SLEEP! SLEEPING OUTSIDE IS SCARY!
OH, THANKS FER TELLIN' ME ....I HADN'T NOTICED!
YAWN!
HEY SOAPY! WAKE UP!
HUH? WHASSAMATTER WIT' YOU? YA T'INK YER A ROOSTER?

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An example of the very early NEIL -- 1975 (from the newspaper strip, fourth week). "Neil is what Mickey Mouse would be like if Mickey Mouse were a horse."

Neil and Mam'selle Poupee all my life."

THERE ISN'T ENOUGH DOORS AROUND HERE.!
THERE'S AN OLD SAYING I PICKED UP IN THE GOBI DESERT: "WHEN THERE IS NO ROOF, THERE IS NOTHING TO FALL ON HEAD".
WHY DON'T YOU MEDITATE?
BUT SOMETHING MIGHT BITE ME!
IT'LL BE ME, IN ABOUT FIVE SECONDS!
YER SEEKIN' YER FORTUNE, AIN'TCHA? WELL, THIS IS IT. GO SLEEP ON THE RAILROAD TRACK! GOODNIGHT!
© 1975 ARN SABA

where I was producing my own shows, sort of semi-offically. I was mostly involved with the **Don Harron** show, MORNINGSIDE, the most popular national talk show, doing half-hour segments, talking about the famous comics. But what I would do to prepare for that — I would not just sit there and talk — I would interview two or three other people who had something to do with it, either the creator of the strip or, if the creator was dead, someone who knew him. So I'd have clips of my interviews to play, plus I'd have skits based on the strips, and I would produce those with actors and sound effects, and I would be in those myself.

MARK: *I would like to have heard those.*

ARN: I did around fifty. I did dozens of them. I did some for Saturday morning, too — plus I did a lot of critiques of musical comedy and theatre history — and then I got to the point where I was producing a lot of other kinds of documentaries and hosting programs sometimes, when the real hosts were away. I'd be the guest host. I also did a six-part program, A CRITICAL THEORY OF COMIC STRIPS, in which I tried to formulate a set of critical terms with which to evaluate comics and concepts. I tried to find out what was unique to the comic strip. I interviewed a lot of the greats, the greats of the comic strip world. I travelled all over the States doing that, and phoned Europe and talked to some of the people over there. Tried to get some sense of what's possible with the medium and judge it. Because if you take a comic and judge it by the standards of a novel or any other piece of writing or gallery art, you usually get a very low opinion of comics. So I was trying to get at what ways we can look at comics, that does not put them down. Because my contention is that the greatest pop art today is the High Art of tomorrow. **Shakespeare** was pop art then. So the whole concept of High Art *versus* Low Art had to be considered.

Anyway, it went on and on. I'm not going to burden you with the whole thing. But that's the kind of thing I did. The CBC gives you the ability to do that. I think at one time I took a survey of all the women in comics, and had them talk about the image of women in comics. Anyway, that's the kind of thing I was doing, and it was great, but I finally got to the point where I was tired of doing it and once again I caught myself by the collar and said, "Hey, are you going to do comics, or are you going to talk about comics all your life?" And I got really tired of talking about these great things that other people had done. They were wonderful cartoonist and did great work, but, gee, no one was going to say that about me unless I got on with it. So I decided to get on with it. *(Laughter.)* I took a seventy-five percent reduction of my income and got into comics!

MARK: *You're a very brave person.*

ARN: You have to be. I don't want to paint myself as a martyr or anything, but all my life I've been fortunate to have the lack of fear of doing what I wanted to do. I've never had a job in my life. I've always done more — or less — my own work. It doesn't scare me. I don't have any designs on security. At least, monetarily. I don't believe those things exist and to Hell with them. If I get killed tomorrow I'll be able to know my life was a good one.

NEXT: "why aren't there more girls at comics conventions?"...the questions you have to deal with when you're a heterosexual man...Los Bros. Hernandez meet Walt Disney...plus more about Mam'selle Poupee, Soapy and, of course, Neil the Horse!

I WONDER IF HE WAS MAD.
HERE'S THE RAILROAD TRACK. IS IT SUPPOSED TO BE COMFORTABLE?
GEE, SOAPY'S RIGHT. THIS IS JUST LIKE A FEATHER BED, EXCEPT FOR NO FEATHERS....
ZZZZZ
WATCH OUT, NEIL! HERE COMES OL' NINETY NINE — TEN HOURS LATE, AS USUAL, AND BURNING THE FREIGHT TO LIGHTEN THE LOAD....
GEE! GOLLY! WOW! WHAT'S GOING TO HAPPEN?

"I'd like to get the market to take funny

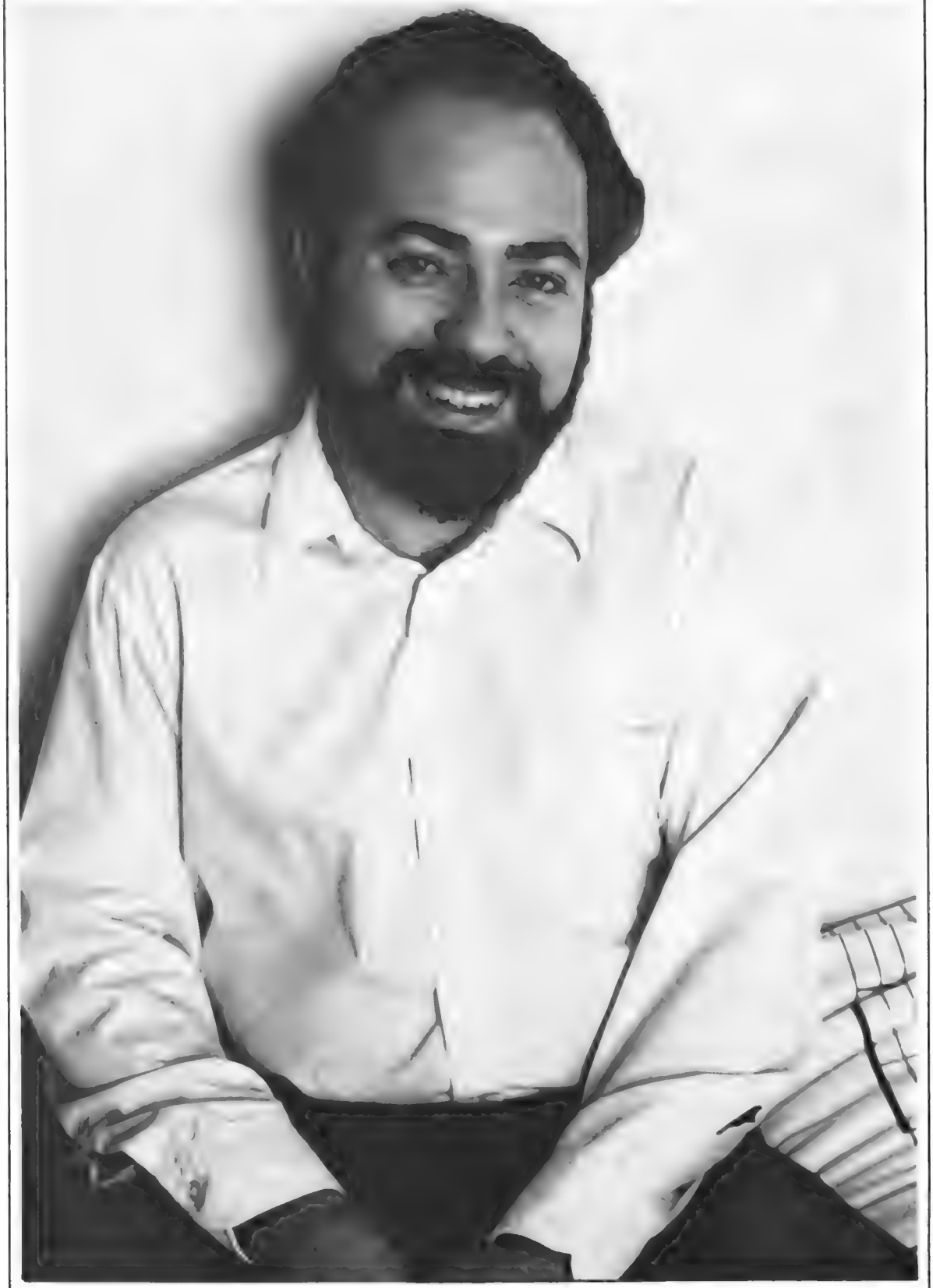

Photo: Pam Harrison

animals more seriously. (Laughter.)"

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ARN SABA

In part one of this interview, Arn discussed his influences from Carl Barks to Milton Caniff...his undisguised hatred of super-heroes ("They're really killing the comics as an art form, and the sooner super-heroes can be cut out and destroyed, the better.")...and his experiences producing comics programs for the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation.

Here in part two, the creator of NEIL THE HORSE talks about such topics as the questions you have to deal with when you're a heterosexual man... Los Bros. Hernandez and Walt Disney... plus the thinking behind Mam'selle Poupee, Soapy and, of course, Neil the Horse!

MARK SHAINBLUM: *Do you have the same feeling about comics — the conviction that you have to do it and to hell with everything else?*

ARN SABA: You have to. At the same time, you want to be sensible. You want to be able to pay your rent so that you don't get thrown out on the streets so you can't keep drawing . You have to have a game plan. But most of the people I know who want to be artists, but can't get around to it, are bedeviled by security fears. People who say, "I'd like to be a cartoonist, I'd like to be a writer, but first of all I want to have a house so I have someplace to live while I write a novel." Come on! You're never going to do it! You have to do it in the face of adversity. Sleep on the drawing board, and have a lovely meal of macaroni and cheese, or whatever you have to do, in some friend's basement. Do what you have to. You can't let reality stand in your way.

MARK: *That's a good way to see it. I've seen people who are accountants or bookkeepers or whatever and have* no *security because they're at someone else's beck and call. I'd rather be my own boss.*

ARN: Exactly. There is no security anyway in this world. It's foolishness. Society is changing so fast, what good would it do me now to start putting money in the bank and trying to build up some kind of equity? I guess — I'm in my thirties now — I'll look at people, friends of mine who have gone the security route, and in a way I envy them. They've got property —

MARK: *Ulcers.*

ARN: Yeah, sure they do. And in a way I envy them. Sometimes I think, "Am I missing the boat? Shouldn't I be accumulating something more for my old age or whatever it is?" And then I think, they're not having anywhere near as exciting a life as I am. I'm having a wonderful life — the best life I can imagine. That's all that counts. I want to have a wonderful time. Girls just want to have fun — me, too! *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *Girls? What are those? There aren't that many at comic conventions.*

ARN: Yeah, that's another topic — why aren't there more girls at comics conventions.

MARK: *Yeah! Let's get more women into the field!* (Laughter.)

GABRIEL MORRISSETTE: *I can't wait to be a guest, so I can have groupies!*

ARN: San Diego was great this year. There were more good-looking women at San Diego this year — a lot of people commented on that. Usually the good-looking ones are all someone else's girlfriends. And all the other ones weigh three-hundred pounds and have terminal acne.

MARK: *The men aren't much better.*

ARN: That's true. But for some reason this year there were a whole lot of really good-looking women.

MARK: *There are a lot more women interested in the field, thanks to ELFQUEST and maybe NEIL THE HORSE and things that are less macho, fighting-oriented, and more —*

"All of us have both sexes within us."

ARN: I think that's it. The preceding two minutes of conversation will probably sound sexist, so let's redress that by having ten minutes of very consciously non-sexist conversation. *(Laughter.)* But it is true — thank goodness — that there are many more women interested in the field — from many points of view — but it's the death of the comic-book field if it doesn't widen itself out to women and children and other ethnic groups. Right now, it's entirely the preserve of seventeen-year-old white boys.

MARK: *Well, I'm a counselor at a day camp, where all the kids are black, and they all read comics.*

ARN: They do? Oh, good. I'm glad to hear that. I didn't think that comics were addressing any other ethnic groups. Well then, another of Arn's theories is shot down. Great — glad to hear it. There's nothing we can add to the discussion of women in comics that hasn't already been said by people who know about the subject better than we do, but I'm certainly glad that more women are coming into the field.

MARK: *Now that you brought up the subject, I'm curious. How do you see Mam'selle Poupee in that respect? In a recent issue you had her in shrinking dresses.*

ARN: I don't always treat her that way. There are questions that you have to deal with when you're a heterosexual man — an almost irresistible tendency — to draw women the way you want them to look, which is to say, really curvaceous and beautiful. At the same time, I have never enjoyed women who aren't really intelligent and strong and independent and doing things. All the girlfriends I've ever had — and my current girlfriend, whom I probably am gong to marry soon — is definitely one of those. She has her own life — very much so. So what I've tried to do with Poupee is combine those two. And I think that's the key to it. I've had a certain amount of flak, I must say, mostly but not entirely from women, about Poupee's rather spectacular figure. And I've given myself a lot of trouble over it. I don't just do it without thinking about it. But what I decided about it was that I don't see any reason that just because a character is "sexy" — I don't like that word — "attractive," whatever you want to say — just because a character is attractive, there isn't any reason to assume that the character isn't also smart, independent, active, talented and doing things. People assume that just because a character is sexy-looking, she's got to be a non-person. Well, that's completely absurd. All of us would like to be sexy looking and also smart. And not all of us in this room are. *(Laughter.)* So that's the way I do it. Her integrity is really important to me, in writing the character of Poupee — because I've always thought of myself as a non-traditional male — never been macho, and I have a great deal of difficulty dealing with that attitude.

MARK: *I think that speaks for everyone in the room.*

ARN: I'm sure that's the case. When I was growing up I was always being pounded by my family and schoolmates because I was not more of a "real man" and all of us have both sexes within us, both physically and mentally. So I wrote the character of Poupee very much from my own life, and my own heart and mind. Therefore it's important to me that Poupee — she's probably the most interesting character in the comic book. And she's going to continue to be prime initiator of the stories.

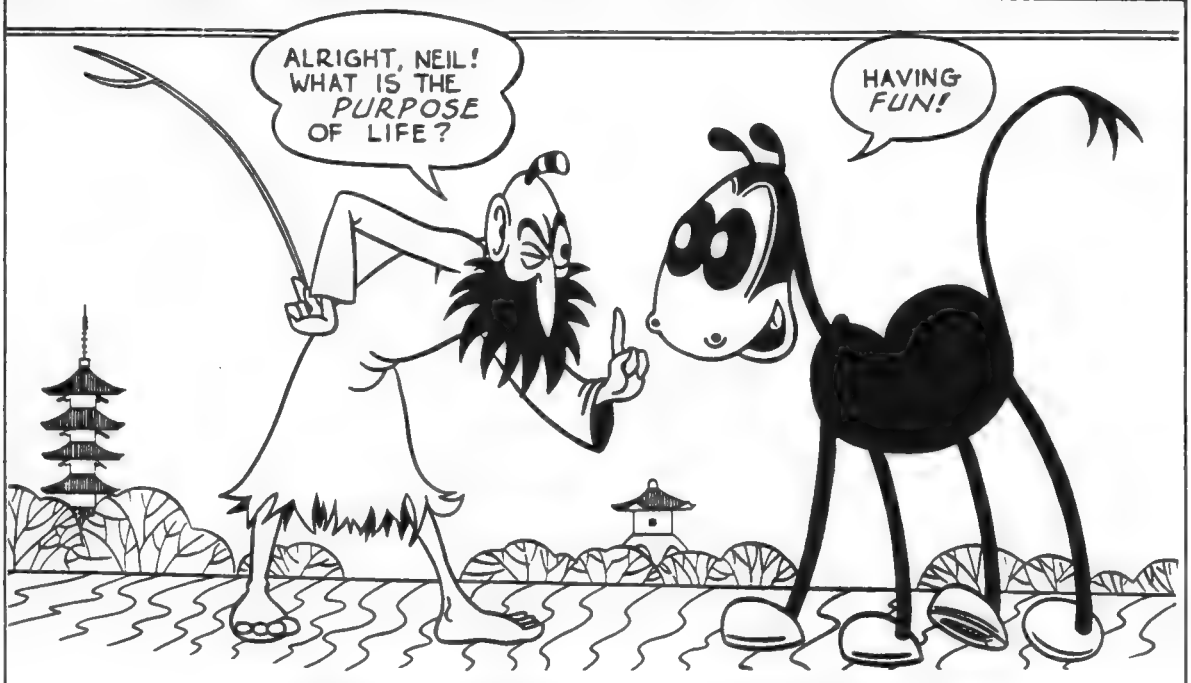
MARK: *Neil is incapable of initiating action because he's a child essentially.*

ARN: And Soapy is too annoyed at the world to initiate anything, except to make a few quick bucks. I've got a story planned, which I hope I will write one of these days, in which she writes and produces and stars in her own musical comedy. I just want to continue to delve right into her life, and her romantic affairs and her friendships. I really want that feeling of her being a fleshed-out character. And I'm very pleased that other men are doing that. Like the **Hernandez Brothers**, in LOVE AND ROCKETS, which I think is one of the greatest comic books ever, ever produced. MR. X as well. I want to give a glowing endorsement here to the **Hernandez Brothers**, who are so talented, and they don't even know how talented they are.

One of the many costumes designed for Mam'selle Poupee by Barb Rausch.

© 1984 Arn Saba

"Girls just want to have fun — me, too!"



Above and below: Sequence from NEIL THE HORSE, issue 3.

GABRIEL: *They are even published in Europe by "Les Humanoides Associes" (METAL HURLANT) under the title, AMOUR, PAIN ET FUSEES. (Love, Bread and Rockets).*

ARN: I understand that's a pun on something.
PIERRE: *It means "a slice of life."*

ARN: Well, I have met the **Hernandez Brothers** a couple of times, and I complimented them very, very highly on their work, and they're so modest and surprised that I should think that they're good. They're better than I am. They're much better writers and artists, and they almost call me "sir," because I've been published for a year longer than they have. But just great guys — wonderful, nice guys, and **Jaime** in particular can draw like I've never seen before. And the writing lives right up to it. I think that's what comics ought to be. If anyone asks, " Why don't you like superheroes?" I say, "Read MR. X and LOVE AND ROCKETS, and you're never going to want to read a super-hero again in your life."

MARK: *I thought that MR. X was a story that was, to some extent, a little too "kinky" for their style. The story was a little too dark and cynical for their style.*
ARN: I know what you mean, and the interesting part of it was in that first issue — the strongest part — was the scene where Mr. X goes with the young women to a party, which is much more a **Jaime Hernandez** scene —
MARK: *Right.*
ARN: — all the beautiful young people at a party! And that's obviously something that he does best. And I agree that possibly MR. X might ultimately be a dead end for them, but at this point, nonetheless, the imagery is so strong, and they're carrying it off real well.
MARK: *I guess they wanted to do a color book.*
ARN: Well, it was brought to them, and they've taken the assignment and carried it off brilliantly. It's not really theirs. LOVE AND ROCKETS is much more from the soul. But in the next few issues it might evolve into something more from their point of view.
MARK: *Well, I see that MR. X and LOVE AND ROCKETS, from their point of view, are in the same fictional universe —*
ARN: Yeah, 'cause they brought Luba in.
MARK: *Exactly.*
ARN: Which was very clever. Yeah. Very nice. Well, it'll be interesting to see where

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"Disney was the greatest cartoon story-writer ever."

they go. Those guys are very young, all in their twenties — Jamie's about twenty-five, twenty-three, something like that — and can draw better than I'll ever draw in my life. I try for that kind of beauty of line and that kind of simplicity, and I utterly fail! I'm just not that good at drawing. But they have a long life ahead of them and I know they're just going to do great things. I have no doubt of that. Increasingly, I'm realizing my limitations as a graphic artist. I'm not as good as I would like to be and probably never will be. So I'm thinking of myself more in terms of my great hero, **Walt Disney**, who was the greatest cartoon story-writer ever, probably. So I am now working more and more with other people where I do the writing of the story, and I do the page design, and I even do the composition — I do the rough thumbnail of the picture — this is what I do with **Barb Rausch**. She will actually do the figures. I'm not very good at figures. Then I will get it back and put in the cartoonier figures, Neil and Soapy, and then I'll put in the backgrounds and do the inking. But I have no compunction at all about using other people's talents when I can't do something. It's a fun thing to do. It doesn't diminish my talents or diminish my achievements — it simply increases them. I get the best of my own work, and the best of other people's. So if I can, possibly, increase the income that I get from NEIL and use my entreprenurial skills to bring NEIL to a wider public, I will continue to hire other people and put their best talents into my work, like the **Disney** studios.

GABRIEL: *One of the best qualities of Walt Disney, in my mind, from what I've read, is that he could take people and get the best out of them — that even they didn't know they had.*

ARN: Exactly.

GABRIEL: *Bill Tytla produced some amazing stuff for Walt Disney, but then when he went out on his own, it was like something was missing.*

ARN: And I think many people who left the **Disney** studios had the same experience. I don't want to flatter myself, but I have been told by people who have worked for me that I have done the same thing for them. Certainly **Barb Rausch** says that. And I think that's true. I am pushing her to do stuff that she's never tried before. Other people I work with — **David Roman** probably wouldn't be doing comics at all without me pushing him. So it's a nice feeling, if that's true. I can recognize what other people can do. I see the potential for what they can do. I like to think I have the same ability that **Disney** had, to see the potential in people's work, and say, "How about trying this?"

GABRIEL: *Often people can't see their own potential. The artist himself is very often blind to his own potential.*

ARN: Well, very often I can see — if I may flatter myself a little — one of my strongest abilities, the thing that sets me apart from other people, is the ability to imagine projects. The ability to think up what might be done — the potential of an artist or a project — using **Disney** terminology, again — to "plus" something, to see what something is and what something can become, or to imagine something that doesn't exist at all. I can imagine something and use other people to make it happen. It seems to be what I'm best at.

MARK: *Speaking of other projects, I'd like to get into that. You say you have other projects in mind. Anything you can discuss?*

ARN: Well... *(Laughter.)* The big one I aways want to keep under wraps. I can be sort of vague and generalize.

MARK: *Generalize. Go ahead.*

ARN: Well, to start from the smallest things, just in the next few issues one of the things I'd like to do with NEIL, is that I'd like to do a 3-D issue and increase the readership —

MARK: *Aw geez. I can't see 3-D effects. Lazy eye.*

ARN: Well, you'll have to read it with one eye closed. But I want to do a 3-D issue because, to be honest, it'll help increase the sales, probably. And eventually I want to gradually move into color. At least we'll do a special issue first — a one-shot, and see

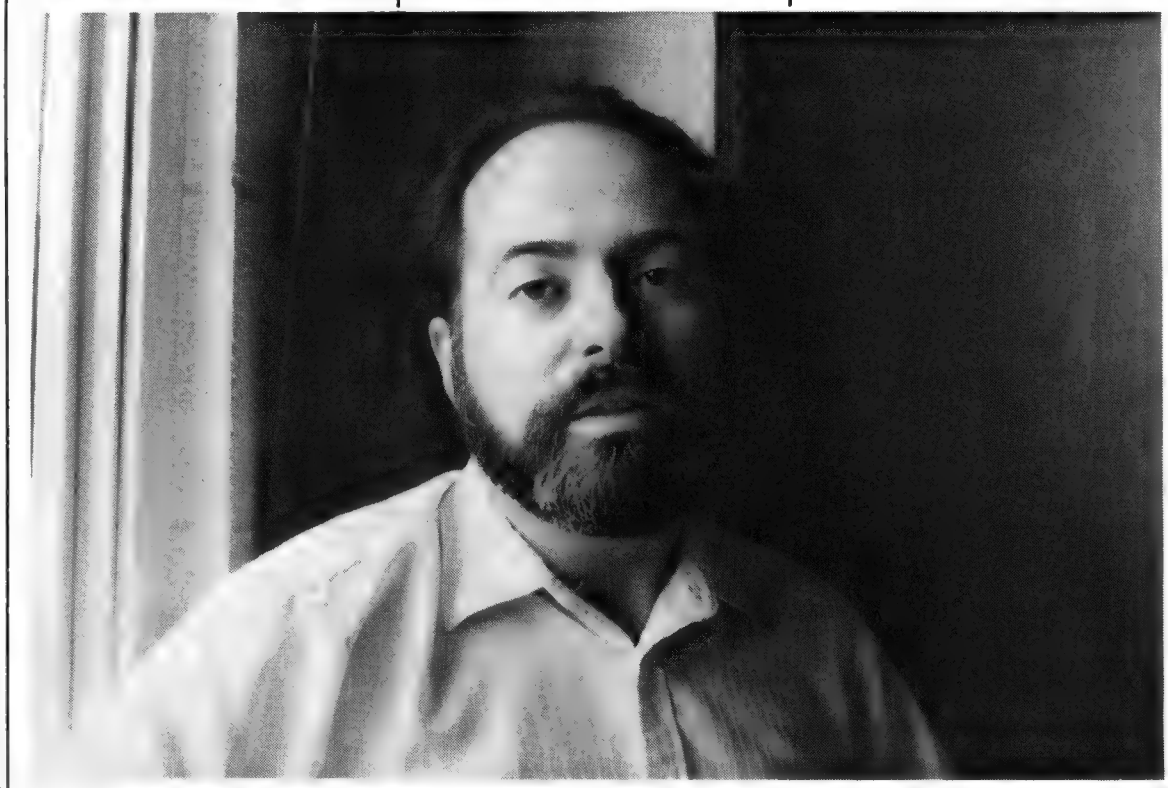

Photo: Mark Shainblum

"I think of myself as a writer more than anything."

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From the second issue of NEIL THE HORSE.

how that increases the sales. Because I think that would help.

MARK: *What about children's text stories, children's books —*

ARN: I was just going to say — we'll get into that — that I'm doing a story for EPIC, which sooner or later I want to get around to finishing.

MARK: *A NEIL story?*

ARN: A NEIL story, yeah — eight-page story, full color. I hope it will be the first of several — or millions, whatever. *(Laughter.)* Yeah, I would like to do children's books. What I'm trying to do now is expand out of the comic-book field. I don't think there's a great deal of potential for me in the comic-book field in North America at this time. Obviously, I'd like to keep bashing away at it and get the market to take funny animals more seriously, shall we say? *(Laughter.)* But, you know, I'm too old to keep bashing my head away forever. It seems stupid to do it. I've spent a great deal of my life just to get this far. Now, I'm looking to see, "What else can be done?" — using this as a stepping stone. One of course always thinks — "Animation! I'll make a million dollars! I'll have my characters on every lunch bucket in the country!" And of course I want that merchandising, which these days all ties into the fact that you just don't go into a book publisher and say, "Well, I'd like to do a children's book, please." They'll ask, "What's your merchandising? Does Mattel have an option on your characters? Do you have a producer who's going to do an animation special?" Unless you want to put out a very small, say children's book that no one's going to read, from some small publisher, which I'm not interested in. I want to do something good and exciting, so what I'm trying to do is go that commercial route. I'm talking with various agents who will have the time, which I don't have, to talk to various merchandising people, and producers. And even then there's a time problem getting together the proposals I need. But I'm working towards that. I mean, that's the way it has to go. So in the last few months I've become much more business-oriented. I've always had a little bit of that, and I finally decided that it runs in the family, and that it's necessary, at least for a while, to think in business-like terms. It's sort of weird to hear myself say these things, because I've always been very anti-establishment. I've never been very capitalistic. I have a pretty left-wing streak to me. And I hope that if I ever did set up an enterprise I would certainly construct it along more humanistic lines. It would be interesting to have sort of an alternative version of capitalism going on.

MARK: *"Capitalism With A Human Face."*

ARN: Exactly. So I'd like that. But that's how I see expansion. Whatever the expansion's going to be at this point, beyond minor expansion, has got to be something with a business structure to it. Because I'm impatient. The business structures that exist do not accommodate me and my kind of work. So I'm going to have to create a business structure.

MARK: *Carve a new doorway down the hall.*

ARN: Exactly. I'm going to really have to do that. I don't want to ever compromise the quality of what I'm doing. Check with me in ten years and see if I've got Saturday-morning animation with NEIL, because then you can say, "Hey — I thought you weren't going to compromise!"

GABRIEL: *Well, the projects of the Pinis aren't working out.*

ARN: Which ones — the animation?

GABRIEL: *Yes.*

ARN: I heard they had to buy that back.

MARK: *They have. They'll be doing it themselves. Nelvana's dropped animation for live action. Which I think is very stupid because they did good animation.*

ARN: They did good animation technically, but they had no story sense at all.

MARK: *That's true.*

ARN: They couldn't write themselves out of a paper-bag, unfortunately. That's why the ROCK'N'RULE film fell on its face. A real dud. I read the Marvel comic-book of it and I must say it left me cold. Too bad. They're very nice guys. And technically they were excellent. And **Clive Smith**, the animation director there, is a very talented guy and I feel sorry that the film didn't succeed. But they should have had a story department. I mean, that's basic, elementary.

GABRIEL: *People say, "Why doesn't animation work anymore?" The same thing with the HEAVY METAL movie. The script was —*

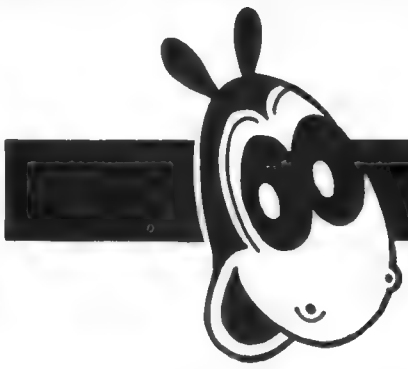
MARK: *Bad.*

GABRIEL: *So-so...*

MARK: *Not so-so* — bad.

GABRIEL: *...and I know Gerald Potterton — he's the director and I met him — and he wanted to do this movie for a year and a half, and he did it in nine months, and you could see that it was done in nine months.*

"I have always worn odd-colored socks."



NEIL THE HORSE

ARN: I saw FIRE AND ICE, the **Frazetta** one, which was really bad, unfortunately, too —

MARK: *You would think Conway and Thomas could do a better job than that.*
ARN: The plot was unbelievably stupid. Princess gets kidnapped, then she escapes, then she gets kidnapped, then she escapes, then she gets kidnapped —

MARK: *And there was virtually no dialogue.*
ARN: — then she escapes, then she gets kidnapped, then she escapes, and it ends.

GABRIEL: *When Mark and I saw it, we said to ourselves, "Now, watch, this is going to happen," and it happened, just as we said.*

MARK: *Yeah. "This is going to happen next, then this and this and this." And that's exactly what happened.*
ARN: Isn't it amazing? I don't think there has been, in at least the last ten years and maybe longer, an animated feature that has had a good story. I guess WATERSHIP DOWN probably. But other than that —

MARK: *But in that the script contracted the story so much that it lost something.*
ARN: But it was pretty good. And that was the only one that I think made money, in the last ten years. What I'm saying —

MARK: *Didn't THE SECRET OF NIMH?*
ARN: I don't think so.

MARK: *It was a good film.*
ARN: I don't think the story was any good. I thought it was very badly constructed. They crowded too much in. They had enough plot for two films, I thought. But what I want to say is if anybody could bring me an animated feature with a really good story, and say, "Here it is, it's well animated, it's got a good story," and it didn't make money, I'd be very surprised. I think the whole idea that animated features don't make money is based entirely on the fact that they're all badly written. Why don't they see that? That's the cheapest part! You know, you can get a pen and paper and write a story! *(Laughter.)*

MARK: *I find that in visual fields — comic books, movies, TV, animation — less so in comics than the other fields — but in TV and movies especially, the writer is a nobody. He's the person who lets the other people put the stuff together.*

ARN: Yeah, that's crazy.

GABRIEL: *When I was an animation student, one of my teachers who worked at the film board mentioned that the main problem with the NFB movies was bad scripting.*

MARK: *National Film Board of Canada.*

ARN: I think that if I ever get to do an animated film or TV special or whatever, obviously the greatest contribution I could make, behind the camera, would be the characterization and the plot. I wouldn't even attempt to draw the animation. I wouldn't even attempt to design the animation. I really think of myself as a writer more than anything else. But I would insist that the story be 100% my story and my music, because I think that I can do that right. That's been the strength of my comics so far. It's not in the drawing — that's for sure. It's been in the writing and the concepts. I think my conception of it: My belief.

PIERRE: *Why are you wearing odd-colored socks?*

ARN: I always have worn odd-colored socks, every day of my life, since I was in Circus Minimus, which is the children's theater company in Vancouver that I was part of. It was part of my costume to wear two socks that were the same pattern but different colors. Always the same socks — the same make and pattern — but two different colors. So I've done that every day of my life from then on.

MAM'SELLE POUPÉE

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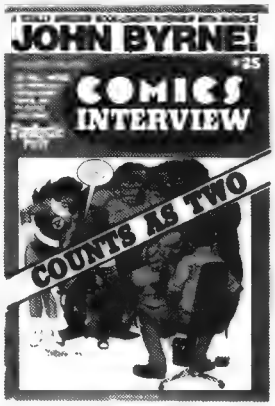

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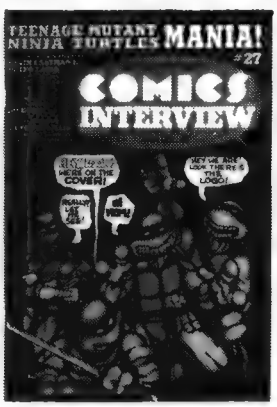

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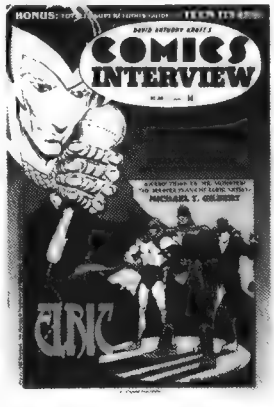

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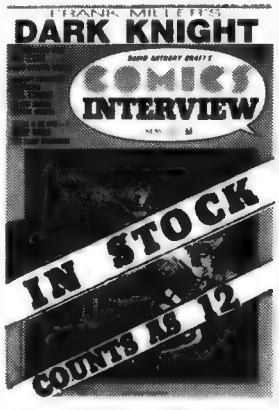

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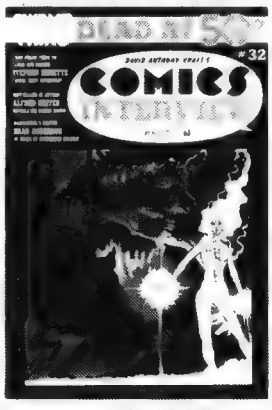

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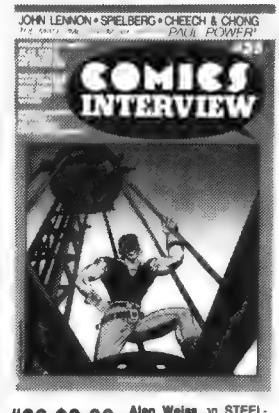

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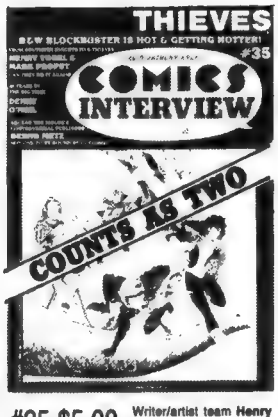

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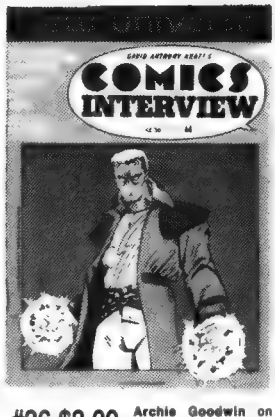

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"JUDGE DREDD was a morally reprehen-

sible character in the role of the hero."

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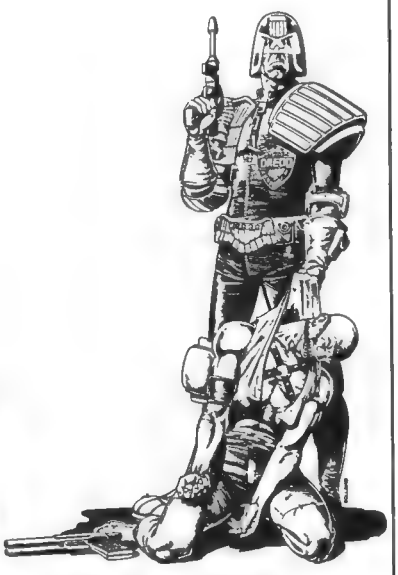


BRIAN BOLLAND

Brian Bolland is one of a number of British comics creators who has transferred to American comics and great acclaim over the past three years. This interview took place at Brian's Central London flat on a mild October evening, and was punctuated with interruptions by Brian's two cats and his impromptu rendition on the musical saw...

FRANK PLOWRIGHT: *Let's start with your first strip work, shall we?*

BRIAN BOLLAND: The first regular strip work I did was POWER MAN, produced by Pickin Publications of Suffolk, who were selling it in Nigeria. Just after **Dave Gibbons** and I had finished doing it THE COMICS JOURNAL ran an article about these racist and imperialistic comics produced in Britain for South Africa. It rather hurt us at the time, because we didn't think we were being racist or imperialistic.

FRANK: *I thought that strip was solely for Nigeria.*

BRIAN: It was originally published in Nigeria and then reprinted in various African countries, including South Africa, but by then it was out of our hands. I think that Dave explained the whole situation in an interview that's already appeared in this magazine.

FRANK: *Some other early work of yours that turns up every now and then is LITTLE NYMPHO IN SLUMBERLAND, obviously based on the Windsor McKay strip LITTLE NEMO IN WONDERLAND. Where did you first come across Mckay?*

VITAL STATISTICS

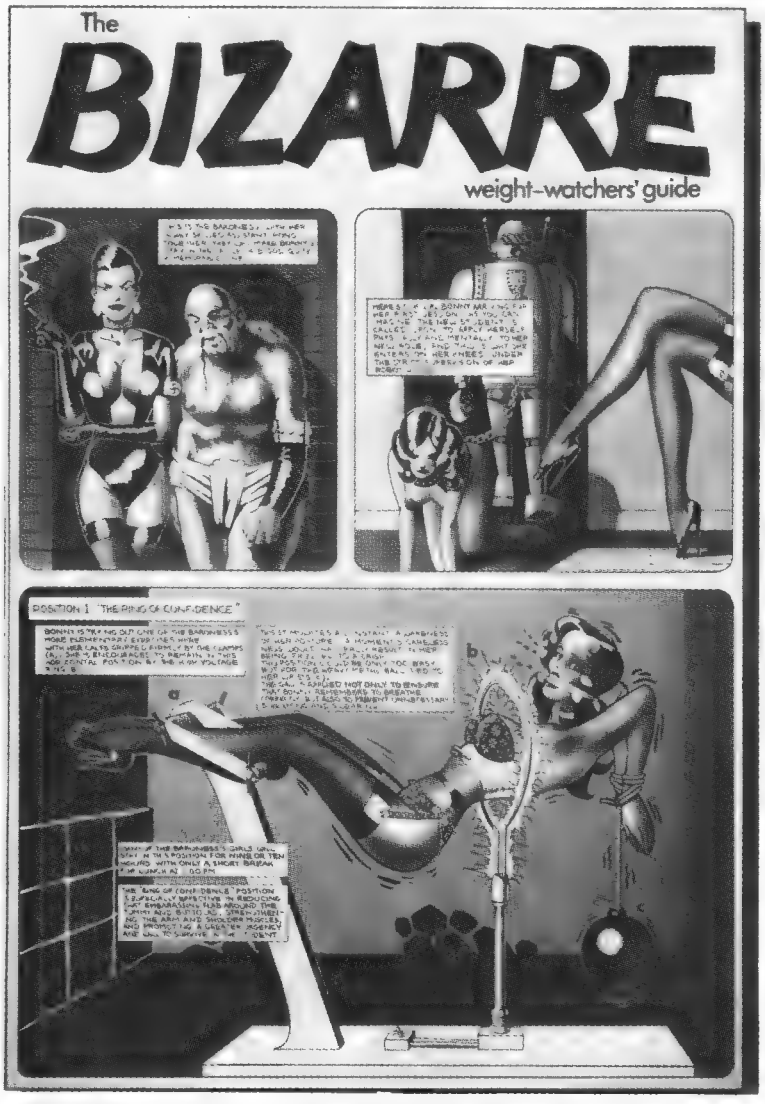
Name: Brian Bolland
Born: 26 March 1951
Sex: Male
Place of Birth: Butterwick, near Boston, Lincolnshire, England
Favorite President: Pass.
Favorite Ruler: King Zog of Albania (now deceased)
Favorite Film Director: Andrei Tarkovski
Favorie Music Group: The Residents (enigmatic weirdos from San Francisco)
Favorite Comic Artist: Alex Toth
Favorite Animal: The Hedgehog
Religion: None (pagan leanings)
Left: Handed
Favorite Place: Urumqi, North West China/Flagstaff, Arizona

BRIAN: Before I was apparently being racist, I was being sexist with LITTLE NYMPHO. That was done in 1971, when I was working for the underground magazines, and the general criteria for doing any kind of work for the underground magazines was that it had to be obscene or offensive. I was drawing comic strips about venereal diseases and all kinds of terrible things, so a completely sexist character like Little Nympho was just second nature to me. I first came across LITTLE NEMO in a magazine called LINUS, which was a French publication devoted to looking at comic strips from all over the world — it was named after the character from the PEANUTS strip — and one issue was published as a British edition, and it had a very good article about LITTLE NEMO. That was the first time I encountered the strip and I thought it was lovely stuff. I then found that big Italian book, which was later reprinted in English, so I think **Windsor McKay** was quite well-known even then.

FRANK: *It's curious that the Europeans were more concerned with preserving the American comic-strip classics — that the Italians produced a book of material that wasn't readily available in the USA.*

BRIAN: Yes. At the same time there was a childrens' book that it was really trendy

"I've pursued perfection at great expense."



THE BIZARRE WEIGHT-WATCHERS GUIDE, from Bolland's blue period. "At the time I was innocent...not thinking for a moment that it was offensive."

© 1984 Brian Bolland

to have a copy of, WHERE THE WILD THINGS ARE by **Maurice Sendak**, and his second book was done in the style of LITTLE NEMO IN WONDERLAND with the thin linework and the thick outline.

FRANK: *So that was the first strip you regularly drew?*

BRIAN: Well, it wasn't regular. I liked the idea of taking the innocence of LITTLE NEMO and reversing it to get the hedonistic delights of LITTLE NYMPHO.

FRANK: *So that's sexist, racist... I wonder what else we can have you up for? Maybe this strip, THE BIZARRE WEIGHT WATCHERS GUIDE. I take it that's from the Brian Bolland blue period.*

BRIAN: At the time, I was innocent and didn't realize that I was offending anybody. I'd just seen SWEET GWENDOLINE or that sort of story somewhere. I think I was in Paris and I bought a book called LES FILLES DU PAPIER, which was all about women in comics. There was a lot about BARBARELLA and a section on the fetish comics, which were fascinating for obvious reasons, particularly the way that they were drawn. There was the attention to detail that's the hallmark of the fetishist.

I was once on a train sitting opposite a nurse and we were talking about what we did. I told her I was an art student and into comics, and showed her a sample of my artwork — not thinking for a moment that it was offensive in any way. It was just stylistically interesting and I'd done lots of studies of that sort of thing and didn't think for a moment that anybody could be offended.

Now, in this totally different climate, I squirm with embarrassment to look at it. Less so with THE BIZARRE WEIGHT-WATCHERS GUIDE, because it's quite reasonably drawn.

FRANK: *2000AD couldn't have been long after that strip.*

BRIAN: **Dave Gibbons** was in on 2000AD from the start, and I did a few covers. Then **Nick Landau**, who was editor at the time, got me to do JUDGE DREDD. A chap named **Bill Ward**, who used to be art director at BUSTER, did one half of the "Mega City 5000" story and I concluded it.

(At this point, the record ends and Brian goes over to the turntable and flips it to side two. It's Robert Crumb and his Cheap Suit Serenaders.)

FRANK: *I've never heard Crumb's records before and always assumed that he was rather a dilettante for producing them, but this is very accomplished!*

BRIAN: I think **Crumb's** music is better than his art, and I have a very high regard for the art. I heard some of this music on the radio and bought a couple of records of **Robert Crumb** music that I really grew to love. Through him I ws introduced to traditional American 20th century music, which was derived from a whole load of curious pigeonholes of American folk music. There's a chap called **Robert Armstrong**...

FRANK: *Is he the same one who produces MICKEY RAT?*

BRIAN: I've never heard of MICKEY RAT. I only know **Robert Armstrong** as a very good instrumentalist with this group and being very well versed in all the traditions of 20th century American music. I can read all the sleeve notes he writes for Blue Goose and Rounder Records and he's a real source of information.

FRANK: *It's fascinating that these two guys who produced what for the times were very outrageous and anarchic comics are very much traditionalists and archivists with regard to music.*

BRIAN: There is a feeling of **Max Fleisher** about **Robert Crumb's** artwork, a Thirties look — even though he was dealing with all the things that were going on in the undergrounds during the 1960s.

FRANK: *We've been meandering here. "When we left Brian at 2000AD, he'd just been handed his first strip."*

BRIAN: I didn't do it particularly well, I'm afraid. I remember that **Mike Friedrich** was visiting 2000AD on that day that I brought my first Judge Dredd episode in and he

"Dredd is a component of a police state."

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didn't like it at all. I think he thought that it was too violent.

FRANK: *I don't think I've ever heard that criticism levelled against DREDD before. I suppose after sexism, and racism, the violence of DREDD was a natural progression.* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: Fascism is more accurate. He is a component of a police state. It was very complicated working on DREDD, because I know he was a morally reprehensible character — but he was in the role of the hero, the main figure in the story that the reader identified with, even though he was a dubious character. I knew full well that he was not the kind of man that I could identify with at all, so I was always trying to draw him in an unsympathetic way.

FRANK: *But John Wagner doesn't take him seriously at all.*

BRIAN: Oh no, but Dredd is played as the straight man, he doesn't make a fool of himself. You can't laugh at him because he's stupid. He's flawless. You find yourself laughing at his extreme position, because of the extreme opposites he comes across.

FRANK: *You've obviously got a fondness for DREDD, though, because you're still drawing the Eagle Comics covers today.*

BRIAN: Oh, yes — I can't help having a fondness for the character. It's strange that you can have such a two-dimensional character that I find infinitely fascinating. In reviews, I've read that people find him two-dimensional, but I like the situation of this robotic figure and the way that he functions in a completely anarchic world.

FRANK: *The two-dimensionality can be ascribed to the difference between British and American comics, though. Soap opera has usurped all else in the USA whereas, in British comics, the plot is more important than the characters.*

BRIAN: That's quite true. I think the pace of a British comics story is much faster. More gets packed into a six-page JUDGE DREDD story than into 25 pages of a lot of American comics, but then there is more room for soul-searching and girlfriend or boyfriend problems in an American comic. For instance, I think CAMELOT 3000 was taking its time...

FRANK: *I was going to get to that later.*

BRIAN: I mean in terms of plot. Some of my colleagues working in British comics kept coming up to me and asking "When does the story start?" The pacing is different. When you have a weekly six-page slot, there's often a whole segment of story. In JUDGE DREDD's case it would be a twelve-page segment carried over two weeks. Of course, having six pages of story was revolutionary in British comics when 2000AD started in 1977, because before that the maximum was three pages!

FRANK: *But they had much smaller panels.*

BRIAN: Yes, they would often have 12 panels to a page and six stories in a comic.

FRANK: *So 2000AD showcased the artwork more than previous comics in the UK?*

BRIAN: I don't think that it was setting out to say "Hey, fans — look at this wonderful artwork." Something provoked IPC to produce a science-fiction comic and **Pat Mills, John Wagner** and **Kelvin Gosnell** among them got 2000AD going. I don't know why they decided to run stories that were six pages long instead of three, although some have said that it was the American comics influence. But none of them are interested in American comics, and at least two of them were completely averse to them.

FRANK: *British comics require tighter deadlines, I presume.*

BRIAN: It was okay at 2000AD, really. **Carlos Ezquerra** could turn out six or seven pages of art a week, but none of the rest of us could do that, so we had to rotate — meaning that there were at least three of us working on JUDGE DREDD at any time. I was the slowest of the three, so when I took my episode in they'd give me another to draw that would be far enough ahead to give me time.

FRANK: *You're considered by most fans to be the definitive JUDGE DREDD artist, whereas Mike McMahon and Ron Smith have done more pages than you...*

BRIAN: Mike had always done more than me, and **Ron Smith** subsequently went on to draw more after I left. I've always thought that Mike was a giant. He warns me off going on about his great talents in public and, consequently, I've reined in a little in saying how wonderful his artwork was and is,

Cover detail from Eagle's DREDD.

"Green Lantern's constantly misused."

to the extent that people now think that I don't like his work.

FRANK: *Well, put that right!*

BRIAN: In my view, there are a few great stylists in the comic-book art field. **Jack Kirby** and **Gil Kane** are masters and — before then — there were the great strip stylists like **Milt Caniff**. **Gil Kane** refined human anatomy and everything else he was drawing to a style that was ultra-real. It wasn't realism any more, but it was completely correct within its own rules, and **Jack Kirby** is the same. You can't look at his art and say, "That's badly drawn," because it's all perfectly drawn within the rules of the style that he's evolved.

A lot of people imitate these stylists, but Mike created something that I've never seen before. I can't think of any other artist who could have influenced him into that way of working. He's more interested in the Spanish artists and Europeans than American artists, but he's developed a grotesque kind of figure and world that is absolutely extraordinary. There's almost a kind of madness in there somewhere. I think he's one of the great stylists. He really shook up the JUDGE DREDD stuff that was being done, evolving the character single-handedly. I think that **Ian Gibson** was always trying to keep up with Mike's evolution, and I was hanging in there for dear life, because I have a more literal approach to a strip. If a script requires that I draw this, I literally draw what's required of me, I don't go off into

Detail from the cover of GREEN LANTERN 127

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"It was quite an alien thing to have a more-or-less naked person flying."

excess the way Mick did, and I would only push myself as a result of looking at the way that he was going beyond what was asked for. So a really great character came about and, because I had the more American-oriented style, I ended up as one that everyone thought of as the definitive DREDD artist.

FRANK: *And after JUDGE DREDD you went to the USA?*

BRIAN: Joe Staton was drawing GREEN LANTERN when he came over here for a convention. He drew a BLACKHAWK episode for 2000AD, and I swapped and produced a GREEN LANTERN cover. I was always a big fan of Green Lantern and still think that he's one of DC's best characters, constantly misused. Joe rang up **Jack C. Harris**, who was editor at the time, and mentioned that he'd got a real fan who'd like to draw something, and Jack said, "Okay, put him on the cover." He'd come across JUDGE DREDD somehow and like my stuff, so he knew what he was getting. That was the cover for GREEN LANTERN #127. He liked it sufficiently to commission me to do two or three more and some for TALES OF THE GREEN LANTERN CORPS.

I'd begun to get a bit bogged down with JUDGE DREDD, because the deadlines were wrapping themselves around my neck and I was beginning to lose my self respect. Spending a lot of time failing to get artwork in on time gives you a crisis of confidence, and I began to feel that I'd burned out on the character, and I got such a wonderful feeling of fannish delight from doing the DC characters with whom I'd grown up.

FRANK: *A friend of mine contends that Green Lantern has a wonderful costume with that green, black and white, but that no one has been able to draw it properly since Gil Kane.*

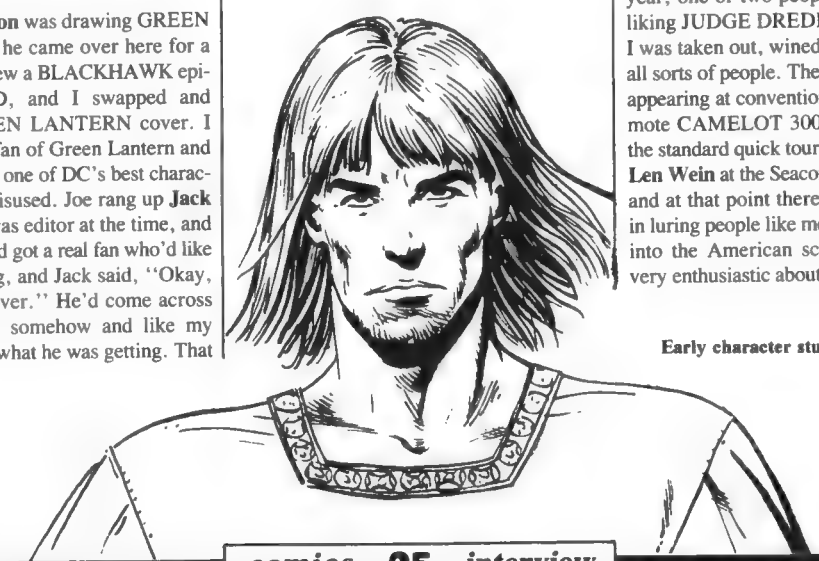
BRIAN: Len Wein came to stay here for a week, last summer, when he and **Dave Gibbons** were working on the character together — and I remember rooting out the first ten issues of GREEN LANTERN and pointing them out to Dave, saying "Look at the black on this costume and notice how it's all black apart from the white glint running down the arms and legs." I don't think a lot of artists have got the fact that it's a shiny black material too well. They leave a lot of the black areas of the costume too white, and all that grey fills in. About issue #25, a weird thing happened. The green armholes slipped over Green Lantern's shoulder and, month by month, they would gradually change until the green was an X shape!

FRANK: *If that were at Marvel, they'd probably have written a story about how the costume was taking him over.* (Laughter.)

BRIAN: So, **Gil Kane** was able to redesign the costume gradually, possibly without the editor knowing. It was nice to see **Gil Kane** drawing the recent annual.

FRANK: *Your next DC work was the stunning Starro covers for the JLA, which were produced "on spec."*

BRIAN: I had been appearing at DC every summer for four consecutive years. The first time I went, **Paul Levitz** — not knowing who the hell I was — gave me the standard tour of the premises and away. The next year, one or two people knew me through liking JUDGE DREDD, and the third year I was taken out, wined and dined and I met all sorts of people. The year after that, I was appearing at conventions and having to promote CAMELOT 3000. Now I'm back to the standard quick tour of DC and out! I met **Len Wein** at the Seacon convention in 1979, and at that point there was a lot of interest in luring people like me away from 2000AD into the American scene, and he seemed very enthusiastic about me doing this or that



Early character studies for CAMELOT.

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"I was obsessed with pencilling CAMELOT

— so the next year that I went to DC, I had a cover ready draw, which was the Starro JUSTICE LEAGUE cover.

I had to change it around quite a bit because they wanted Superman's chest insignia visible, and by the time it was printed Zatanna had changed her costume, so I had to stick a patch on with her new costume. And after reading FLASH for twenty years, I hadn't noticed that the lightning bolt on his chest only had three zig zags, and not four as I'd drawn.

FRANK: *And then on to CAMELOT 3000. Did you have to modify your style at all for the USA?*

BRIAN: I decided that I was enjoying being connected with DC so much that I'd work for them regularly, and they offered me CAMELOT. Since I'd agreed to work for them, I was prepared to take anything — I wasn't going over there with any pretensions that I was anything special, because I knew that I would have to teach myself to work in the American scheme of things from scratch.

I remember sitting in a spare room at DC trying to think up what the Camelot characters were going to look like, only having a very vague idea of what **Mike Barr** had in mind for them at that stage, when **Julie Schwartz** came charging in and said "Draw me a cover," and I said that I would. I think I was trying to overcompensate and draw DC stuff exactly the way I thought people at DC would like it — and finding that it was quite an alien thing to have a more-or-less naked person flying. It's something you don't find in JUDGE DREDD, so I had to produce a grace and flowing line that wasn't really required in British comics. **Joe Orlando** gave me a pep talk on what the figure looks like in motion and how a figure ought to look when it was flying.

In the end, with CAMELOT, I felt that I could draw it more the way that I wanted to, because it was being promoted as "**Mike Barr** and **Brian Bolland's** CAMELOT 3000," so having heard that, I assumed that it was going to be a comic book the way that I normally make something look.

FRANK: *I was pleased that the covers were yours as well.*

BRIAN: Len wanted covers from me, but wanted to keep editorial control over them, with me over the ocean — so he had **Ross Andru** lay them out. Much as I respect **Ross Andru**, it's difficult to work over his layout without making it look like a **Ross Andru** drawing. One of the great hallmarks of a **Ross Andru** cover that I noticed way back when I was reading METAL MEN comics was that he always used to draw a diagonal line across the bottom of the page so that everything was on an inclined plane, going uphill. The angle was taken from worm's eye view and your point of view was somehow resting on a line that was drawn diagonally to the bottom of the page. He used that technique on the cover of CAMELOT 3000 #2.

FRANK: *Wasn't there also an abortive cover to issue #1 that was later used as a promo shot?*

BRIAN: Oh, yes. When I received the cover layouts, I thought in my rather headstrong way that I would show them that I could layout a good cover, so I produced a cover that was not based on the layout given and it didn't work out very well. Len decided not to use it on the cover and gave me a dressing down, telling me to get on with the cover as specified.

FRANK: *Something that always struck me as strange about CAMELOT 3000, when it was first released, was that it was produced on the Strontium 90 resistant paper and sold at $1.50 — obviously a project aimed at the fans. Yet the people producing it were Mike Barr, who wasn't that well known...*

BRIAN: ...and myself, who was a complete unknown.

FRANK: *Quite. Did that occur to you at the time?*

BRIAN: I knew I was going to be drawing a twelve-part book, and there was talk of it being on some fancy paper, but I'd not seen this stuff and assumed it wasn't going to be anything really different. When it eventually materialized, CAMELOT didn't look like any comic book I'd ever seen!

FRANK: *What about the coloring?*

BRIAN: Ah, well — I did see the coloring *(laughter)* and flinched. There was one scene in issue #1 in Stonehenge, and I know what Stonehenge is like — a grey, atmospheric sort of place. At least, it was before they put the gift shop around it. The colors that **Tatjana Wood** would normally use for a comic to be printed on the usual paper would be muted, and would probably look okay, but on this non-absorbent paper they looked dayglo and screaming. That just wasn't the atmosphere that I knew existed at that place, so I wasn't happy with the coloring for quite a while. You can use more muted colors on that paper and **Tatjana** toned her colors down. I kept writing notes on the artwork saying "For God's sake give me a beige, give me khaki!"

FRANK: *How did you feel about the way that CAMELOT developed generally?*

BRIAN: I think it was a very grand scheme on the part of Mike. He was a scholar of the Arthurian literature and he was particularly interested in the Arthur/Guinevere/Lancelot triangle. In order to bring them back into a future world, he invented

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. . . I was trying to dominate the inker."

the alien invasion of Earth — which is a pretty huge event and could have all kinds of repercussions and interesting aspects. But, as a result of this invasion, the original set-up of Arthur and the whole team came out of the past and the love triangle and the intrigues were there all over again — and when Tristan came back as a girl, that led to all sorts of possibilities. . .

FRANK: *. . . which were exploited to the full.*

BRIAN: *(Laughter.)* Actually, I was the one who said "Well, what about Isolde?" and Mike and I decided that for inconvenience's sake she would also be a women, and that could be a fascinating situation. So the inter-relationship of all these characters became the most interesting part of the book. I was always worried about what was going on in a world being overrun by hordes of big green creatures, who were doing terrible things to mankind, while our crowd were mooching about having love affairs and sneaking around the bushes.

FRANK: *On behalf of all CAMELOT readers who see this, I'd better enquire about the delays with the artwork for the last few issues. Actually, it was okay until about issue #9.*

BRIAN: The book hadn't been scheduled until I'd drawn issue #3 or #4, so I did have a few months head start at the beginning — and, even then, I was actually waiting around between issues for another script to come. I had the time to draw Zirk for WARRIOR in between the scripts for issues #1 and #2. I was never quite able to do the work within a month, and I was getting more and more obsessed with pencilling in such a way that I was trying to dominate the inker. No insult intended to the inkers, but I was getting so possessive about what the book looked like that I was trying to turn in pencilled artwork in an inked style, which took a hell of a long time. I felt that — as it was a twelve-issue series — it had to look better and better, so I was trying to put more detail and more finish into the pages as time went on, and I was spending up to two and a half days pencilling one page quite a lot of the time — especially with the last issue.

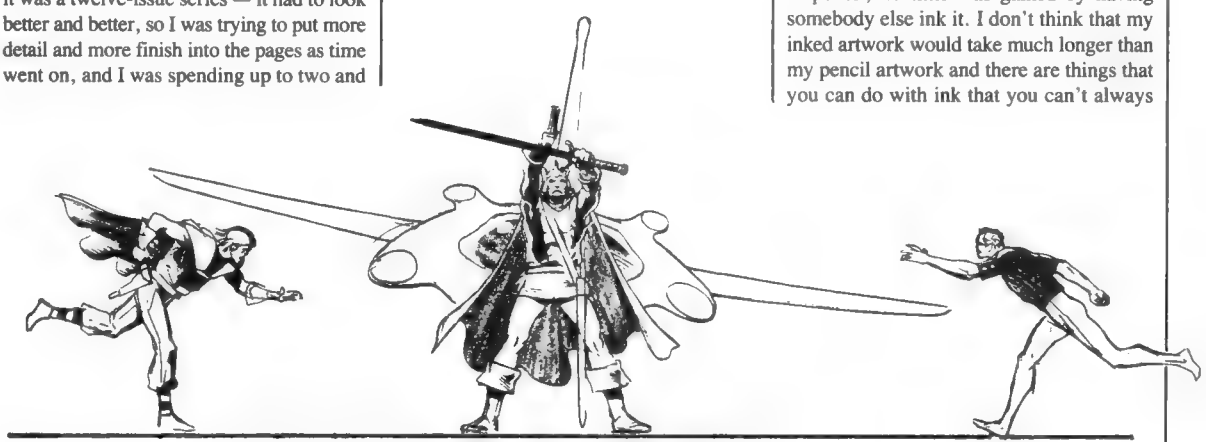
FRANK: *Which should be out before this interview!*

BRIAN: Well, I've been informed that, to my horror, it's now going to be printed on the 18th of December and will be in the shops at the beginning of the new year.

FRANK: *Why "to your horror?"*

BRIAN: After I'd finished the last issue, I thought, "Thank God for that, and it's only six weeks now before it will come out, which will make it only five months late." And, quite sensibly, they're now having to re-advertise it so that the kids who started reading the series, who're now grown men with whiskers, are reminded what this thing was. So they're re-advertising it and that will put it back by another three months.

I think that, because I was trying to ink in pencil, no time was gained by having somebody else ink it. I don't think that my inked artwork would take much longer than my pencil artwork and there are things that you can do with ink that you can't always



Samples of Brian's "inking" with a pencil -- from CAMELOT 3000, of course.

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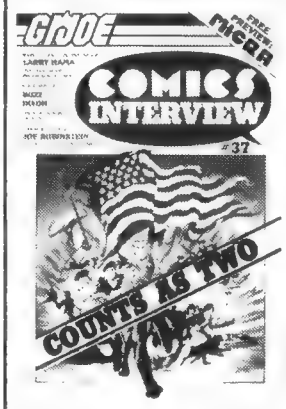

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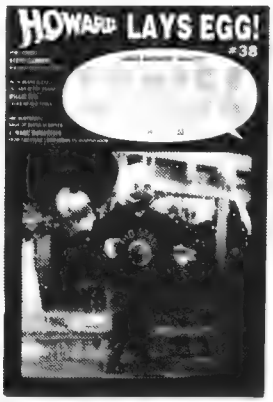

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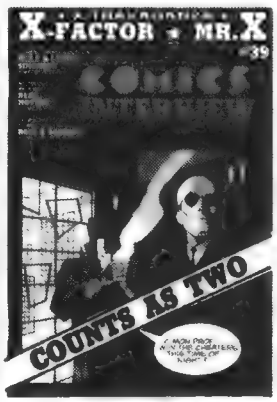

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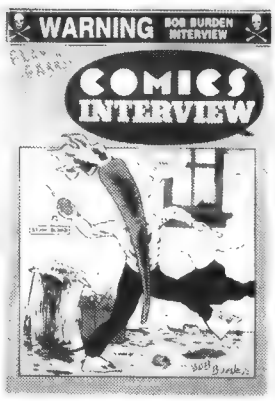

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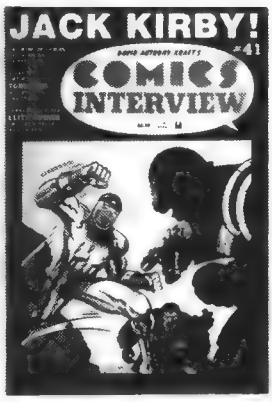

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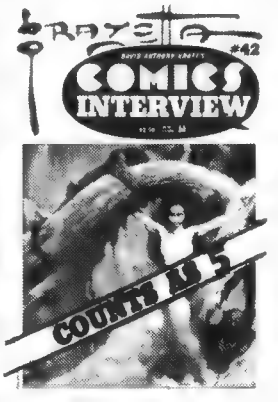

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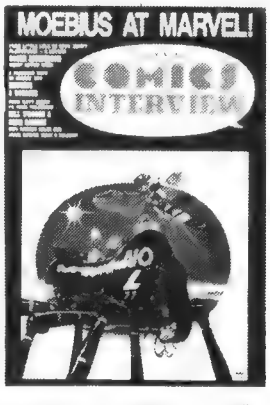

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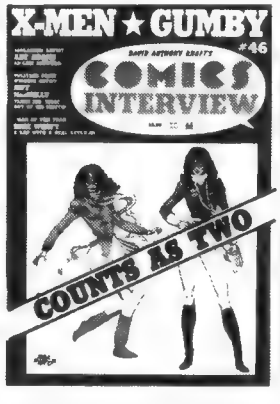

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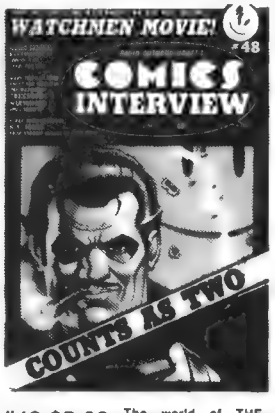

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"DC & Eagle were talking about BATMAN MEETS JUDGE DREDD, written by Alan Moore."

foresee in pencil. There are different ways of putting on the line which you can't dictate in the pencil approach that would be essential ingredients in the atmosphere of the story.

FRANK: *Then again, the corporate requirement for an inker isn't as necessary these days, with the number of limited projects going on.*

BRIAN: There is more of an attitude towards the prima donna in comics now, with the likes of **Frank Miller.**

FRANK: *Would you call him a prima donna?*

BRIAN: I think so. Anyone who can completely take over every aspect of a comic book, even down to what part of the cover the DC logo should fit, is a creator indulging himself to the nth degree. The end result could be fantastic, and in the case of RONIN it was an extraordinary end product, but I wonder whether that's what people really want from a comic.

FRANK: *I understand that RONIN didn't sell as well as expected, but it may have been aimed at the wrong market by selling it to the traditional comics fan.*

BRIAN: I found I was outraged at just how far Frank was pushing the medium of comic-book art. I wish I could be outraged more often.

FRANK: *I thought the art was excellent, but from what I read, the story was minimal.*

BRIAN: I think I felt that way, too.

FRANK: *Since CAMELOT you've been doing covers for JUDGE DREDD and, at one point, there was talk of you drawing another project involving Dredd.*

BRIAN: For quite a while DC and Eagle, working under license from IPC, were talking about doing a BATMAN MEETS JUDGE DREDD comic. A synopsis was written by **Alan Moore** a while ago, but due to the usual complications when companies — be they major or minor — try to get together, after a lot of haggling and discussing and countless attempts to convince IPC that Batman was a viable character — "Who is this Batman character? Didn't they have some sort of TV series about him once?" — the whole thing fell through.

The story synopsis that Alan handed in seemed a very interesting idea. The whole premise would have been that Judge Dredd is an organ of the law whereas Batman represents justice, and the story revolved around the conflict between these two, and the misunderstandings that would arise from the two completely different ways of looking at how society is run. The two would be mutually incompatible.

FRANK: *You'd be able to toss Batman into Mega City One and lose him!*

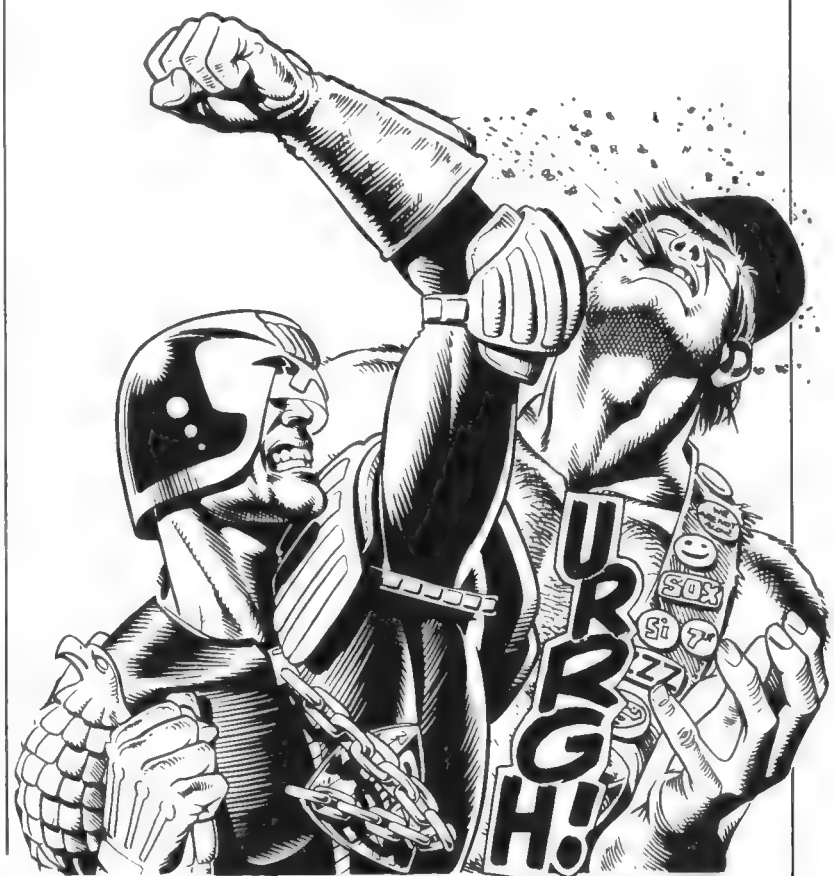
BRIAN: There was that problem, that he would get swamped by an environment that was as rich and confusing as Mega City One, which is as big a star of the JUDGE DREDD stories as the main character. Each character would have spent a bit of time in the other's environment, and there was the danger that the Mega City would look more interesting than Gotham, but Alan was convinced that Gotham as seen through his eyes would be just as extraordinary as anything else you could imagine.

It was all very much under wraps for a while, but now that there's no possibility of it coming about...

FRANK: ***. . . everyone should write to IPC and say that they want to see it. A deluge of letters ought to be addressed to Steve Mac Manus, Fleetway Pub., 3 Fl., Greater London House, Hamstead Rd., London NW17QQ***

Since that fell through, you've been doing DREDD covers. What with them and the portfolio pieces, it seems you're having more fun with design than with sequential art.

BRIAN: That's interesting, because I've always been very bad at page layouts. **Trve Goring's** great strength is very nice page composition, because that's the thing that interests him most, but it's often to the detriment of his storytelling. I've never been very interested in the actual layout of the page, or the technique, composition and balance of the page. I've always been interested in the individual panel and what's in it, and actually having to fit them all on a page is a bit of a problem. In the past I've bogged down in trying to do flashy page layouts, when it's an area that I'm not interested in — I'd rather stick with regular-sized rectangular boxes and get the story told as well as possible within the boxes. So I'm more interested in the narrative than composition and design at all times. Even when I'm doing covers, and it's only one picture, I'm trying to get across an image which is in itself a story, or at least an intriguing trailer to a story that makes you want to find out how this situation came about and how it develops. Even that is a form of concentrating on the narrative rather than the design.



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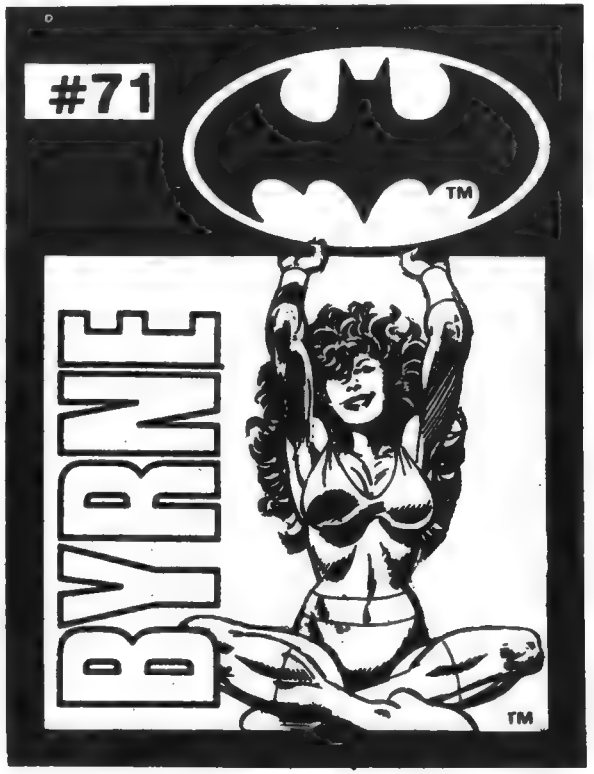

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"Judge Dredd is an organ of the law—

FRANK: *And that leads us conveniently into your portfolio...*

BRIAN: Some while ago, I remember saying that I thought that people who spent their time doing limited edition prints were wasting everybody's time and money. I bought **Will Eisner's** set of prints and **Neal Adams'** set of prints and that's about all, since I resented the fact that these comic-book artists were concentrating their time on doing these fancy print portfolios, when they ought to be getting on with drawing comics.

The thing is that a writer stores up words. He studies and listens to the way that people talk to one another and the way that circumstances come together to make stories, and his head is full of the technique of storytelling. An artist looks at images and stores these images in his mind for the future — but, unfortunately, no writer is ever going to tap this reserve of visual images stored in the artist's brain.

Recently, a French publisher, Editions Deesse, got a lot of the American artists, one British artist — me — and a few French artists, and had them produce work for a portfolio. For once, I was given the chance of just filling a blank space with anything. I thought I'd never be able to work without a script, but I found that the images were ganging up to get out and be first onto the page. They're images that are too complicated to relate to a story; they couldn't be told in words — so that's now an excuse as to why I've changed my mind and the reason why I'm doing six prints. They'll probably be completely fascinating to me and no one else will like them.

FRANK: *I think that portfolios by comics artists have developed their own set of cliches that are as bad as the comics. Skimpy costumes, matallic phallic symbols...*

BRIAN: There's nothing very special about them, they're just comic-book panels, but they fail because you can't read a story. But there are people like **Wrightson**, whose technique is so lovely that it's just nice to look at him doing Frankenstein.

FRANK: *I loved Wrightson's illustration for the SUPERMAN #400 portfolio — even better than yours. With yours, there was a peculiar effect with the light shining through the glasses.*

BRIAN: Yes, everybody's told me that that didn't work. At some stage, I've seen somebody with specs on, with a light shining up their nose, and it had the effect of focusing light on their forehead. You saw the shadow of the rim of the glasses, which gave them a demonic look, and there was a way that the prism at the edge of the glass concentrated that light in the shadow — but a lot of people thought that it looked like goggles, so in that respect it didn't work, yet I liked it.

FRANK: *I'd like to talk about the technique of your art, but ignorance prevents me sitting here and nodding sagely when you say "Yes, I use a Windsor and Newton #42 porcupine quill brush." Do you think you use the same tools as the majority of comic artists?*

BRIAN: I think the thing that makes me remarkable is that I don't use anything very special at all. When I was drawing LITTLE NYMPHO IN SLUMBERLAND all those years back, I was using a Rapidograph — which was the latest invention at the time, I suppose — but when I started drawing comics professionally, I really had to learn to use a brush. I now discover that a lot of people have worked with a crow quill pen, but I've never been able to push a pen around at all. I just can't stand the noise it makes on the paper. And the pen also just catches in the paper and goes "flick," and you get splashes of ink everywhere.

FRANK: *That's far from the conventional answer.*

BRIAN: During a formative period of my career, I was really intrigued and impressed by **Nestor Redondo's** artwork. He had a beautiful brush illustration technique that I thought was excellent, and I was trying to use a brush the way he did for a while. For a long time, I used the brush and nothing else, but the artists who used pen impress me at the moment. For instance, **Bill Sienkiewicz**, whose work is currently some

Plate from Bolland's portfolio for Editions Deesse.

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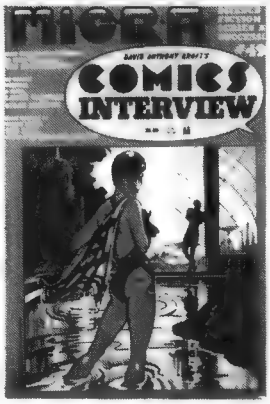

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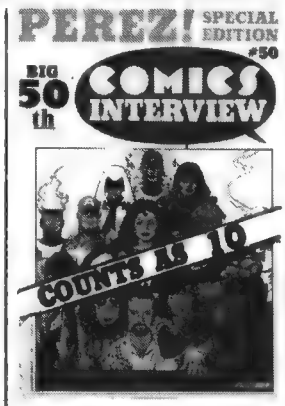

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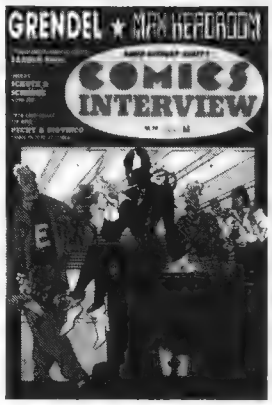

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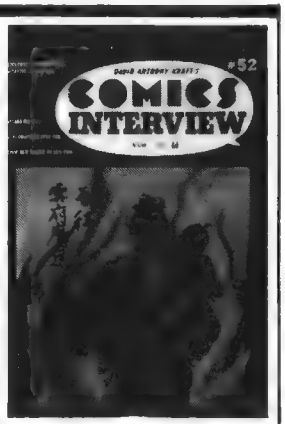

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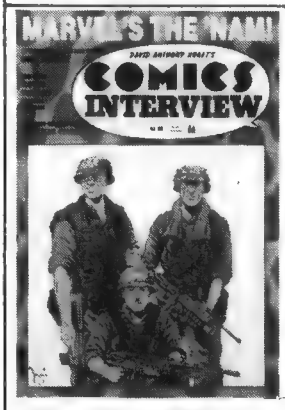

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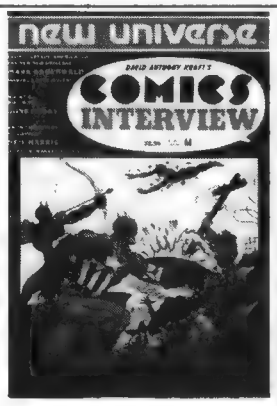

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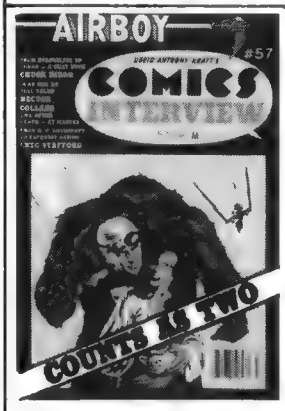

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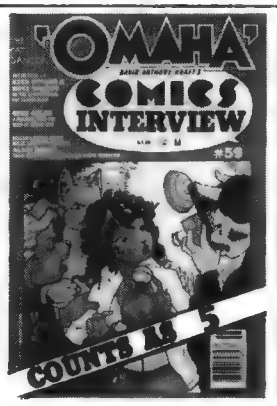

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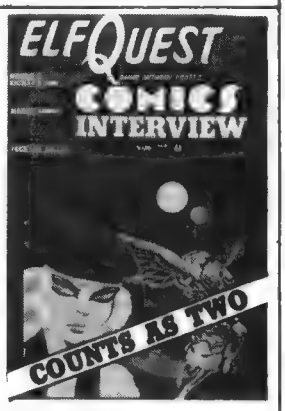

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—whereas Batman represents justice."

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of the most exciting comic-book work around. It's great to see the vigor that somebody who uses a pen can put into the line. **Walt Simonson** scratches his way across the board and digs holes in it. There's a wonderful pleasure in looking at lines that are put on with abandon that you don't get from looking at these slow perfectionists like **Nestor Redondo.**

I find that nowadays my hand and my brush are busy doing one thing and my brain is screaming, "For God's sake, get a move on." I watch my hand doing these terribly slow-motion contoured lines which take forever to end, and I can actually quite dislike my own work — because in my mind I'd like to be working in a different way. I think I've pursued perfection at great expense in terms of the time taken to do the art.

FRANK: *I find one of the most appealing aspects of your artwork is that your faces are so expressive, something that's usually displayed in visual shorthand in comics.*

BRIAN: I can't remember exactly at what point I suddenly decided that gesture and facial expression were crucial, because — certainly in British comics — you get artists who are very good at drawing planes and tanks but their human characters are very disappointing. They're often very tiny figures who don't seem to come to the front because they're swamped by all the hardware in British comics. I'm still not very good at vehicles and that sort of thing — in fact, I based the spaceships in CAMELOT on some sheep's vertebrae that I had. I've got a little mirror that I used to prop up in front of my desk and grimace into. I've long since given up looking in the mirror, but I find that when I have to draw an angry face I have to grit my teeth and feel angry in order to do it. There was a period when I was actually using my own face and trying to change it to look like whatever character I was drawing. I did Black Canary in JLA #200 after she'd been bashed on the head, and she was feeling the bump on her head and frowning — and that was actually my face, minus the beard.

FRANK: *I remember that really stood out. Batman crouched in a tree looming over Black Canary in that story was great, as well. There was talk at one time about you doing a BATMAN graphic novel. In fact, there's been talk about lots of people doing a BATMAN graphic novel!*

BRIAN: Before the idea of Batman and Judge Dredd teaming came along, **Mike Barr** was suggesting that we do a BATMAN graphic novel together — but only very recently, I hear that everybody is doing BATMAN in some way or another and I think that little corner of the field is rather crowded.

THE CAROLINA COAST, OFF CAPE HATTERAS, IS MORE SWAMPLAND THAN SANDY BEACH, AND IN ITS DARK AND NOISOME REACHES, A MAN COULD WANDER LOST FOR DAYS WITHOUT SEEING THE SUN...
...A FACT THAT IS ONLY NOW BEGINNING TO IMPRESS ITSELF UPON A CERTAIN EMERALD ARCHER...
CHAPTER 6
GREEN ARROW
BLACK CANARY
vs.
BATMAN
I'VE GOTTA BE CRAZY.
WHAT AM I DOING HERE?
TAGGING ALONG WAS YOUR IDEA, OLLIE.
YOU DIDN'T WANT ME FACING UP TO THE BATMAN ALONE--REMEMBER?
FAT CHANCE OF THAT NOW, PRETTY BIRD. WE'RE LOST.
WE'LL HAVE TROUBLE ENOUGH FINDING THE ROAD, NEVER MIND FINDING--
art: BRIAN BOLLAND * coloring: ADRIENNE ROY

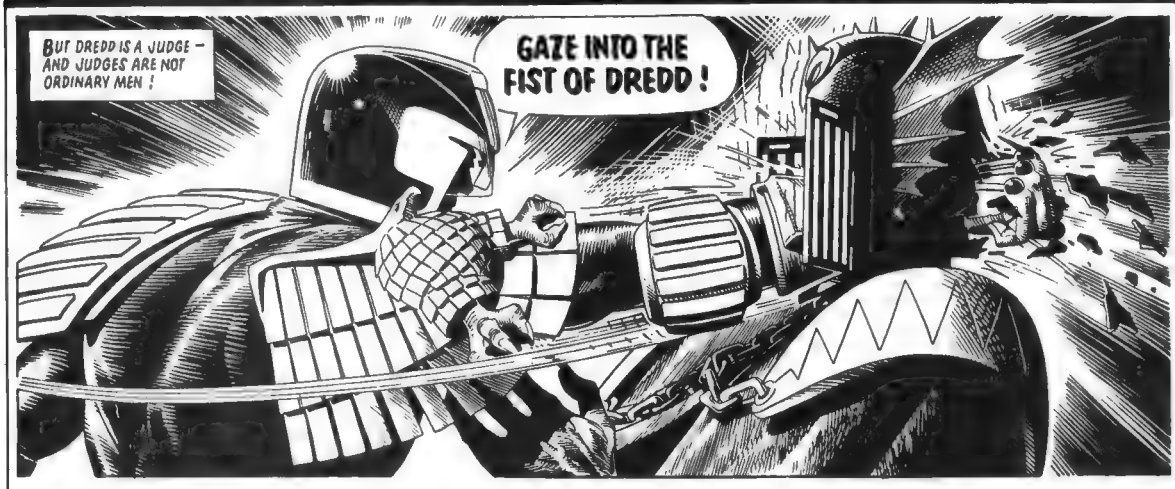
FRANK: *I noticed that a number of chickens crop up in your art. Why is that?*

BRIAN: I used to live with chickens and, in the case of the portfolio, it's that I've always been fascinated by humans with animal heads. When I was quite young, I remember seeing a copy of MY GREATEST ADVENTURE, drawn by **Nick Cardy**, I think. It was set in Egypt, and the people had animal heads.

There is something that goes right back to the *id* that tugs very sensitive strings in the back of your head when you see an animal-headed human being. There's a very good story about a woman who saw animal-headed people, and the animal head would relate to what the person was really like. These people would be quite nice to her, but deep down they were a snake, and so she saw the head of a snake, and gradually a conspiracy evolved around her and she could see that her husband had the head of a lion or some other predatory animal. Eventually, she went to the hospital and she was treated for it, and recovered to the point where she didn't see animal-headed people any more — but she looked at herself in the mirror and she had the head of a doe, head bowed, ready for the kill.

FRANK: *That's a nice irony. Totally unrelated to that. . . I feel that the artwork in comics has progressed a whole lot further than the writing, which is not much higher than the standard of the 1930s.*

"You can't deal with the same degree of



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BRIAN: When I first went over to working in America, I didn't really think there were many comics about that were worth reading — but while I was working on CAMELOT, lots of things cropped up that were really well-written. LOVE AND ROCKETS. AMERICAN FLAGG introduces a whole new way of writing and thinking about the comic story, but up until that point comics was an artist's medium to me.

In an interview that made a few enemies for him, for a while, **Joe Staton** said that he thought that comic-book writing was a third-rate artform but comic-book art was a first-rate artform. I think, at that time, we weren't actually shown otherwise. Comics inevitably have a trivializing effect. You can't deal with the same degree of human emotion and significance in comics as you can elsewhere.

FRANK: *I'd disagree. I think it can be done, but that no one's bothered to do it to any great extent.*

BRIAN: I think it would make very tedious comics.

FRANK: *No more than it makes for tedious books or films. Comics are drowning in a morass of superheroes at the moment. Even a book like AMERICAN FLAGG, that's well-written compared to most, revolves around what is a superhero, to all intents and purposes.*

BRIAN: I think the problem with anything is that you're stuck with *genre*. Comics are stuck with superheroes. In the case of television, you have to define what you're working in...it's either the cop drama or any of a number of other categorizable *genres*. It's very difficult to sell someting that's not recognizable.

FRANK: *LOVE AND ROCKETS transcends the* genre.

BRIAN: Yes, LOVE AND ROCKETS does transend that, but it's one exception. I really enjoy it. I love the people in it, I find them very attractive characters. We get the feeling that Rita Titanon was once someone wonderful and there's a feeling of great myth that goes back to the days when she was a wrestling star. I think they're so likeable. They're people — not characters, somehow.

FRANK: *So it can be done. All it needs is someone to lead the way. Everything else on the stands thrives on conflict.*

BRIAN: But as an artist I find there's a vigor about a drawing that depicts somebody knocking someone else's head in.

FRANK: *Don't you find that there's only so many ways you can do a fight scene before it becomes exceptionally contrived — on JUDGE DREDD, for instance?*

BRIAN: Oddly enough, looking through all the episodes of JUDGE DREDD I drew, I can't remember more than two fight scenes. Dredd poses a lot, standing with his gun up. There was one occasion where he puts his fist through Judge Fear's helmet, and that was probably my finest hour — but you can't live on your memories.

There isn't much fighting in DREDD. Certainly, people don't get knocked through walls.

FRANK: *But there is violence and the suspect morality.*

BRIAN: I'm absolutely against the idea that's been propagated in comics that there is such a thing as good guys and bad guys. I think it's a dangerous concept that "we are the good guys and they are the bad guys," it's a frightening attitude. That's why I liked Judge Dredd. He wasn't the good guy and everybody else the bad guys. I would hope the reader was watching a confrontation between two extreme approaches. I would expect the readers to have that level of sophistication, but maybe they don't.

FRANK: *I would think that comics would have changed by now, if they did.*

BRIAN: One thing I would love to do is a comic about a whole set of characters who are set in a kind of modern world, who — instead of slugging it out and knocking people through walls — actually operate through international intrigue. Through deals and trade with other countries and all the ways in which the supposed good guys and bad guys of this world struggle with one another. I'd show them in such a way that you saw that each one of them was playing the same game that all the protagonists in our world are playing.

FRANK: *The post-Watergate American society pushed comics in that direction for a short while.*

BRIAN: At the moment, though, there's the 400 group (or something like that) who're a born again Christian fundamental group who're attacking comics because they contain pentagrams and Satanic symbols. I can see people attacking comics because they're too gruesome and violent — but to attack comics because some of the heroes derive their power from magic and pentagrams is ridiculous. In fact, what this group actually said was that it leads children into superstition. From my extremely prejudiced position, I view religion as superstition, but that wouldn't stand up in court.

FRANK: *But no one could prove the existence of God in court, either. I haven't seen the topic of fan admiration dealt with in any interview yet.*

BRIAN: It's all very confusing and very weird, because when you're with comic-book people you can get this curious impression that the field in which you're working is so incredibly important. One can feel an enormously important star, and that's ludicrous — because all we're doing is knocking out funnybooks. But while it is ludicrous, you can't forget that the professional freelancers are very important assets to

human emotion in comics as elsewhere."

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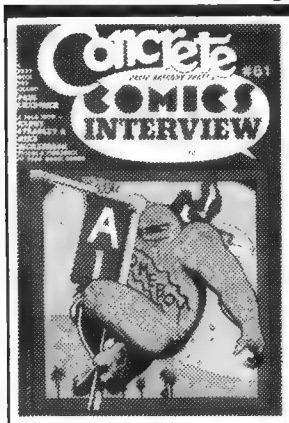

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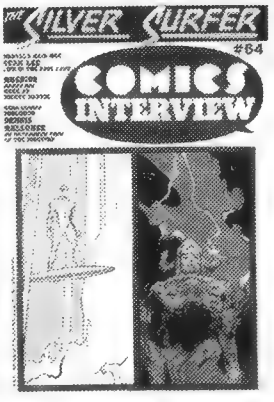

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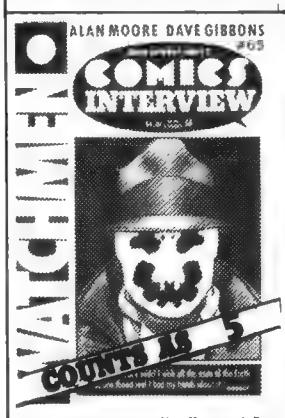

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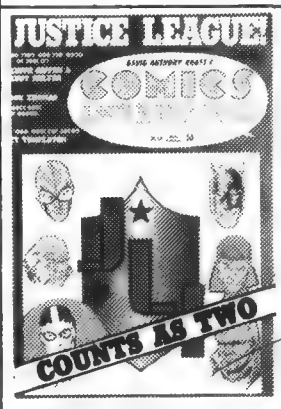

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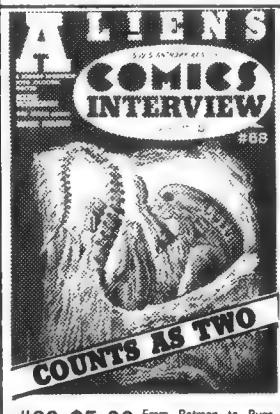

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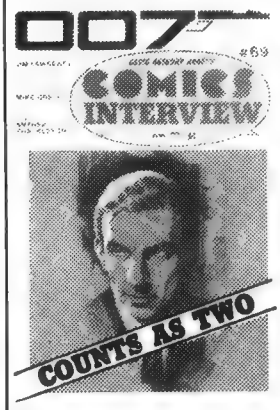

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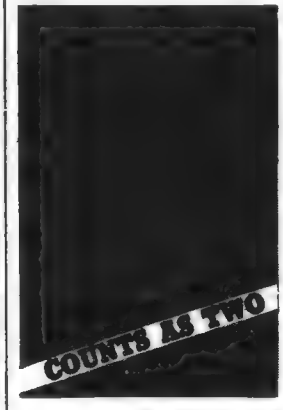

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"I could do a pretty nifty BATMAN."

IN THE LAB OF THE UNBELIEVABLY EVIL DOC FRANKENHEIM, THE INCREDIBLY UGLY ASSISTANT, YGOR, CONFRONTS HIS NEW SELF, AFTER A DISASTROUS EXPERIMENT.
:SNIFF: MASHTER, YGOR HAS A GRIZZLY VISAGE!

Panels from "Walter the Wobot -- Fwiend of Dwedd."

the companies. We're sufficiently important to them to pay us thousands of dollars.

FRANK: *Is your art influenced by the cinema at all?*

BRIAN: I've always liked the *avant garde.* There's a Russian film director, **Tarkovsky**, whose films I think are great.

FRANK: *Didn't he produce a three-hour space film?*

BRIAN: That's SOLARIS, which was long winded, but that's the way he makes films. **Tarkovsky** made a film called THE STALKER which is excellent stuff, and filmed in this muted rusty-green color. You have this depressing, dripping, mossy gren effect all the time, and his films are so slow that sometimes you think that the film has stopped. *(Laughter.)*

In STALKER the idea is that three men, called The Professor, The Writer and The Stalker, go into the Zone — which is a region they feel they have to get into because it's forbidden and guarded. Something caused this Zone, but we don't know what it was. In the middle of the Zone is the Room, and in this room your dreams come true. The three spend most of the film getting into the Zone, crossing the Zone, and getting into the room. The story doesn't really matter, because the film is all about their striving to get into this central area and the marvelous imagery that's used. I find that, even with all the millions of dollars of special effects that **Spielberg** uses, this chap can create magic on the screen that I find takes my breath away. There's a scene of a girl sitting with her head on a table, and she's looking at a glass. You watch her for about five minutes as she's lying there watching the glass.

FRANK: *I don't think that I'd be watching for five minutes.*

BRIAN: Ah, but then the glass moves across the table and you're not told how. Presumably, the girl made it move. Finally, when the three get to the room in the center of the Zone, they're on the outside of the room looking in. We're in the room, and we sit there looking out at them looking in, for ages. And it rains inside the room. You look through the rain in the room at them looking in, and this scene goes on for so long — but in a way this is the most extraordinarily magical thing you've ever seen.

FRANK: *You get stoned first.*

BRIAN: Maybe I should try that!

FRANK: *I read a great letter in a fanzine once, in which a guy wrote that his friend thought that Jack Kirby's BLACK PANTHER was the best comic he'd read — but what he used to do was get stoned before he read it.*

BRIAN: Because **Tarkovsky** uses minimalism, there are long periods where not much is going on. Something almost insignificant can happen in the corner of the picture that will knock you back into your seat, when you're just about ready to leave. There's another long slow scene in a room in the dark and it's raining outside — he uses the rain a lot — and you're watching this black shape in the middle of a room, which is a man lying asleep on a bed. You see a leaf being washed down the outside of the windowpane and, apart from the rain, that's the only thing moving in the whole frame. The moving leaf becomes absolutely fascinating, but after a while a black dog walks out of a lit room at one side, and because it's black you can only just see it. It's like looking at a **Trevor Von Eeden** page. The dog is almost like a demon or the devil himself walking out of the kitchen, because it's just this black shape with pointed ears and bright eyes walking out of the light into darkness.

FRANK: *I don't think I'd have the patience to sit and watch that.*

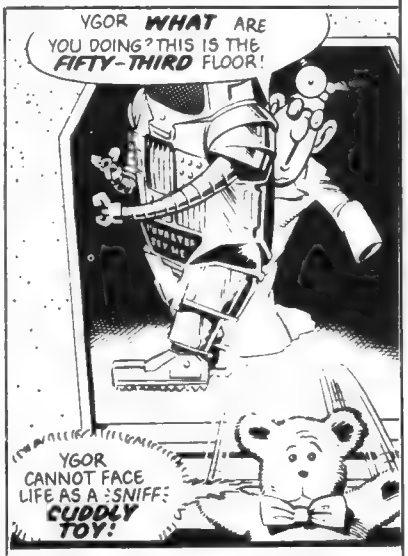
BRIAN: For years I've enjoyed the artwork in comics without being interested in the story. Likewise, I can be seduced by the richness of the visual image in these films without the constraints of plot.

FRANK: *It's probably quite true that I can't.*

BRIAN: There's just a feeling of danger and magic in **Tarkovsky's** films that millions of dollars of special effects can't create for me. We all know how they're done, and there's no mystery at all.

FRANK: *The batteries are running out here* (pointing to tape recorder), *is there anything else you want to see in print?*

BRIAN: I suppose I should put in a quick plug for the work I'm doing at the moment.



The DREDD Eagle covers seem to be taking a lot of my time. The Fink Bros., who are a famous pop group recording under an assumed name, they're really *(mumble mumble)*, are bringing out a record about Judge Dredd called "Muties in Mega-City" and I'm doing the sleeve. There's the six prints for Editions Deesse. There's a "Munden's Bar" story for First's GRIMJACK, which is pencilled in a drawer somewhere. I'm dropping in at DC soon, and I hope we'll be working out what I'll be doing for them next. I'm keen to do a good female character of some sort. At some stage, I intend to have a stab at writing and drawing something — there are a bunch of characters in the Old Testament that I've taken a fancy to... No, I haven't been born again! And then there's Batman. I still think I could do a pretty nifty Batman. So who knows.

THE VEWY, VEWY END!

Don: "THE BUYER'S GUIDE owes its

San Diego Comic-Con in August 1976. The award was for

existence to us." Maggie: "We're insidious."

DON & MAGGIE THOMPSON

As far as comics fandom goes, when you say Don and Maggie Thompson, you've pretty well said it all. They've been fans longer than some of us have been living (presuming many of us were born since 1962), they've seen comic-book aficionados in their phases from Silver Age to present, and they've helped shape comics fandom in all its incarnations through their publications. From NEWFANGLES through ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME to THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, they have typed, carboned, mimeographed, laid out, edited, interviewed, researched, criticized, published — even illustrated works for their own or others' fan publications. All of this happened, mind you, while they kept up full-time careers as journalists and parents.

Their current position as co-editors of THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE, fandom's largest-selling newpaper, comes as a logical culmination of all that went before. CBG started in the early Seventies as a tabloid newsprint adzine, under entrepreneur Alan Light. The publication became the "marketplace of fandom," a paper in which the faithful could find almost anything *pertaining to their favorite hobby hawked weekly. (My own collection would be a bit poorer had not Mr. Light's creation come along when it did, I can assure you.) The BUYER'S GUIDE was bought out by Krause Publications in the early Eighties. Don and Maggie had been supplying the 'zine for years with a potpourri column of much entertainment value, "Beautiful Baloons"; with the change of ownership, they found themselves drafted into full editorship, and crafted of CBG a tabloid that carries about as many ads, but which festoons itself with far more articles and features than its predecessor and which is now fully typeset, to boot.*

Not surprisingly, circulation of THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE is on the rise. A goodly portion of its success must be laid to the efforts of Don and Maggie, who bring editorial expertise to the paper.

Fans interested in checking out CBG should write them for a free sample copy at 700 E. State Street, Iola, Wisconsin 54990. What the heck, they've plugged us!

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Donald Arthur Thompson

Occupation: Co-editor, THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE

Residence: Iola, Wisconsin

Born: 30 October 1935

Credits: Co-editor (with Dick Lupoff) of THE COMIC-BOOK BOOK and ALL IN COLOR FOR A DIME. A couple of published short stories, a few comic-book stories, probably a hundred or so magazine articles, 22 years with THE CLEVELAND PRESS, during which I wrote hundreds of thousands of words — from book reviews to crime news.

Favorite Movies: NASHVILLE, M, THE BELLS OF ROSARITA, THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW.

Favorite TV Shows: DOCTOR WHO, THE TEXAS WHEELERS.

VITAL STATISTICS

Name: Margaret Judson Thompson
Occupation: Co-editor, THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.
Born: 29 November 1942
Residence: Iola, Wisconsin
Credits: Various and sundry early fanzines with Don, also much material for THE CLEVELAND PRESS, the long-running "Beautiful Balloons" column in TBG with Don. I created and edited FANTASY EMPIRE for New Media Publishing, and Don and I created and edited a publication called THE GOLDEN AGE OF COMICS, which is now helmed by Ron Goulart. My favorite thing that I've ever written about comics was probably THE SPIRIT article that appeared in THE COMIC-BOOK BOOK.
Favorite Movies: NAPOLEON, LONG DAY'S JOURNEY INTO NIGHT, THE ROCKY HORROR PICTURE SHOW.

"We said there should be a science-fiction

LOU MOUGIN: *Did you have any interesting experiences during your days on the CLEVELAND PRESS, Don?*

DON THOMPSON: Yeah, especially covering crime news. I was involved with some hairy situations.

MAGGIE THOMPSON: He called in a story about a burning building once — from inside the burning building. There weren't any other phones!

DON: It was the middle of the night. Where else was I going to find a phone?

LOU: *How did you get out of that one?*

DON: Quickly. *(Laughter.)* She didn't mention the time that I went up in an attic with a bunch of police after a fugitive who had just killed a policeman.

LOU: *Did they get him?*

DON: Oh, yeah.

MAGGIE: I thought he'd get Don — that was what I was worried about.

DON: The annoying thing was that the photographer chickened out and didn't come in. I wanted him to take some pictures. He waited out in the rain, and the water shorted out his camera, so we didn't have any pictures of them bringing the guy in.

LOU: *Don and Maggie, you've both been in fandom as long as I can remember there being a comics fandom, which goes back at least to the Sixties. How did you become Fans Proper and get together as a team?*

DON: We started out as science-fiction fans. Maggie was kind of born into it because her mother is **Betsy Curtis**, a writer of science fiction for all the top magazines in the Fifties and Sixties. I discovered science fiction when I was in high school, and several years later we met at a science-fiction party held by **Basil Wells**, a pulp science-fiction writer. **Andre Norton, Edmond Hamilton, Leigh Brackett, P. Schuyler Miller** and several other people were there.

LOU: *All the Old Guard.*

DON: Yeah. And so we became friends and, later, more-than-friends. We got talking to **Hal Lynch**, who was an active SF fan at the time, at the World Science-Fiction Convention at Pittsburgh —

MAGGIE: Labor Day Weekend, 1960.

DON: — and we said there should be a science-fiction fanzine with a comics orientation.

LOU: *That was XERO, wasn't it?*

DON: No, XERO was **Dick Lupoff's** fanzine, but we didn't know about it at the time.

MAGGIE: Oddly enough, the first issue of XERO was distributed at that convention as a giveaway — but we didn't see it then.

LOU: *Sounds like High Irony of the highest caliber.*

DON: Well, it was apparently comic-book time. Because we went home and put out HARBINGER, which was intended to be a one-shot just to let people know we were gathering material for a comics fanzine to be called COMIC ART. That appeared in the fall of 1960, and we came out with the first issue of COMIC ART in March or April of the next year. Unknown to us and independent of all this, **Jerry Bails** came out with the first issue of ALTER EGO in March of that year!

MAGGIE: So we did COMIC ART, and also wound up doing HARBINGER as a separate fanzine for a while, too. And we were in CAPA-alpha almost from the beginning, with RAINY DAYS, so we did all these various publications —

LOU: *And GOSH-WOW, which came along later in the Sixties.*

MAGGIE: That wasn't ours.

LOU: *Oh, sorry.*

DON: That's okay. It's confusing! We later did a news fanzine, called NEWFANGLES, which ran 54 issues and just got to be too much work for us. All of these, of course, were part-time fan projects, and I was working for the CLEVELAND PRESS at the time. I had to be to work at about sunrise — which means I'd have to get up at 4 o'clock in the morning. So staying up until 3 o'clock a.m. collating, stapling, addressing and stamping fanzines — and doing this every couple of weeks — just got to be too much. It got kinda hard to get up and drive into Cleveland.

LOU: *But you kept doing it, year after year!*

DON: Finally, we announced a year in advance that we were planning to pack it in with NEWFANGLES, to give another fan editor a chance to get started. It was the

"This is the one-sheet newsletter that predates the first fanzines of 'organized' comics fandom. It was done to say there should be a comics fandom and get support for it. Fall 1960 or Jan '61 (50 copies).

HARBINGER

Editor: Don Thompson #1 Art Editor: Maggie Curtis

HARBINGER is more than just a one-shot, it is a sighting shot, published in hopes of reaching as many potential supporters of and contributors to COMIC ART as possible.

COMIC ART is a projected fanzine devoted to, as the title suggests, comi art. Not only comic strips and comic books, but cartoons (political, ga or sports); Big/Better Little Books; hardcover or paperbound collections whether of strips or cartoons; animated movie and TV cartoons, etc.

CONTENT will be of several types, designed to appeal to the casual peruser, the avid fan, the collector, or the reminiscer who grows nostalgic at mention of bygone books, strips, episodes or characters.

FOR THE NOSTALGIC, we will have items on old-time heroes, villains or sequences. (The nostalgic are also urged to write to Dick & Pat Lupoff, 215 E. 73 St., New York 21, and ask for copies of XERO; it's free for letters of comment and, if you're at all interested in comic art, you will comment, probably at length, on the series "And All in Color for a Dime," which deals with old-time comic book heroes.

FOR COLLECTORS, we will try to have indices and bibliographies of strips, books (comic books and collections) and series characters. Projected on this line: a checklist of Walt Kelly material, indexes of the Tarzan Sunday strips and a list of Dell non-series titles, plus whatever reader ask for that we can get.

FOR THE FANS AND CASUAL READERS, who will probably make up the bulk of our readership, we will have discussions of current strips, examinations of the type of plot used by certain writers and artists, biographies of artists and authors and a host of other material -- if someone will contribute it. Already on hand is an article by Dick Lupoff on super-heroes and costume-heroes.

FOR THE PURISTS, let us point out that the editorial "we" is accurate in this case. Maggie is in charge of the drawing and Don does the writing and text editing, but each has a say in what the other does. We fully cooperate and collaborate on the whole project.

IF YOU ARE INTERESTED in receiving or, we fervently hope, contributing to COMIC ART, write and say so. A postcard will do for now, though a little more response is hoped for later on.

fanzine with a comics orientation."

Seventies, by then, and along came **Paul Levitz** and **Paul Kupperberg** — who had been doing ETCETERA — which they had combined with THE COMIC READER, which had been going on for ages —

LOU: *Since 1961, I think.*

DON: It was another one of those things **Jerry Bails** started. He started various projects and then turned them over to other people to continue them. So we helped establish THE COMIC READER as our replacement, since we were phasing ourselves out. We gave **Paul Levitz** his start, if you will. Everything he is today, he owes to us. *(Laughter.)*

MAGGIE: Sure.

DON: I don't want to take anything away from Paul. He's made it to where he is on his own. Anyway, after a few months of our lying around, gasping, **Alan Light** asked us to do a column for THE BUYER'S GUIDE.

MAGGIE: No.

DON: No?

MAGGIE: Alan came to us and wanted to be the publisher of NEWFANGLES, which he wanted to continue as a monthly news magazine. But we had, flatly, had it with news magazines. It's really a lot of work. We never wanted to do that again. He asked us if he could be our publisher — he would provide the bankroll and the circulation, and we would provide the editorial copy. We said, "Don't be ridiculous — of course not."

DON: I had forgotten that. But, anyway, with a beautiful sense of timing, Alan waited another month or two, and asked if we would like to do a news-and-comment column for THE BUYER'S GUIDE.

MAGGIE: Which he had started because we wouldn't let him do NEWFANGLES.

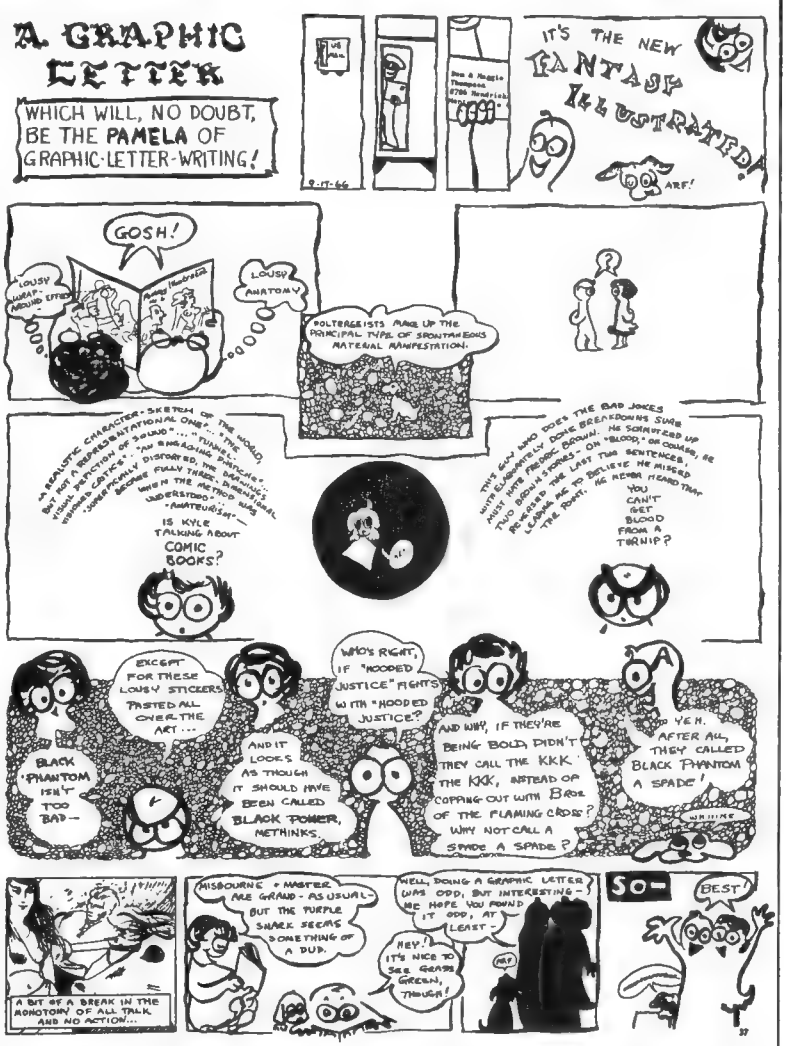
DON: There you go! THE BUYER'S GUIDE owes its existence to us. I keep forgetting all these details, because — Lord- this was a long time ago! We started a lot of people off without realizing it. **Fred Hembeck,** for example, credits us for the for his DATELINE: @!!?# column. We did an illustrated letter of comment to **Bill Spicer's** FANTASY ILLUSTRATED, and Fred told us years and years later that that was the inspiration for his DATELINE pages.

MAGGIE: We're insidious!

DON: You never know what seeds, when cast aside, will take root and grow into a form you don't even recognize, yourself. Anyway, Alan had a good sense of timing — he waited just long enough for us to get restless over not having any place to —

MAGGIE: Mouth off. *(Laugther.)*

DON: Mouth off, right. I was going to say, "express our opinions," but Maggie's more accurate. So we ended up doing about 150


A GRAPHIC LETTER
WHICH WILL, NO DOUBT, BE THE PAMELA OF GRAPHIC-LETTER-WRITING!
IT'S THE NEW FANTASY ILLUSTRATED
ARF!
GOSH!
LOUSY ANATOMY
POLTERGEISTS MAKE UP THE PRINCIPAL TYPE OF SPONTANEOUS MATERIAL MANIFESTATION.
IS KYLE TALKING ABOUT COMIC BOOKS?
EXCEPT FOR THESE LOUSY STICKERS PASTED ALL OVER THE ART...
BLACK PHANTOM ISN'T TOO BAD—
AND IT LOOKS AS THOUGH IT SHOULD HAVE BEEN CALLED BLACK POWER, METHINKS.
WHO'S RIGHT, IF "HOODED JUSTICE" FIGHTS WITH "HOODED JUSTICE"?
AND WHY, IF THEY'RE BEING BOLD, DIDN'T THEY CALL THE KKK THE KKK, INSTEAD OF COPPING OUT WITH BROS OF THE FLAMING CROSS? WHY NOT CALL A SPADE A SPADE?
YEH. AFTER ALL, THEY CALLED BLACK PHANTOM A SPADE!
A BIT OF A BREAK IN THE MONOTONY OF ALL TALK AND NO ACTION...
MISBOURNE + MASTER ARE GRAND - AS USUAL - BUT THE PURPLE SHARK SEEMS SOMETHING OF A DUD.
WELL, DOING A GRAPHIC LETTER WAS ODD, BUT INTERESTING - WE HOPE YOU FOUND IT ODD, AT LEAST -
HEY! IT'S NICE TO SEE GRASS GREEN, THOUGH!
SO-
BEST

The graphic letter from Don & Maggie, printed in FANTASY ILLUSTRATED 7, that inspired Fred Hembeck (who just happens to be cover-featured in INTERVIEW 22)!

installments of the "Beautiful Balloons" column for Alan in TBG. Then, in June of 1982, the CLEVELAND PRESS went out of business after 104 years. One hundred and four years for them, 22 years for me — which was pretty traumatic. That fall, Alan called to tell us he'd sold THE BUYER'S GUIDE and FILM COLLECTOR'S WORLD and that when asked who could edit these — someone with journalistic experience, knowledge of comics and of movies, etcetera — he'd recommended us. Krause Publications flew us up, interviewed us for two days, and hired us.

LOU: *So editing the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE is the capstone of your entire fan career.*

MAGGIE: It's like we were training for 20 years each for jobs that didn't even exist when we were training for them.

LOU: *Right. There was no such thing as professional comics-fan publications in the Sixties — not even in the late Seventies.*

BILL CHADWICK: *So after more than 20 years in fandom, what would you say are the biggest changes you've noticed?*

DON: When comics fandom started, fans were really nice people who liked comics, admired comics, were interested in them, liked the people doing them, and so forth. Now you have the fans who like to show their superiority by insulting and heckling the people who are turning out the comics. There's a sort of hostility and wise-guy attitude that I dislike enormously. There was none of that, early on. I mean, if you don't like comics, go do something else — go play baseball or something. If you do . . . it's not quite the same as biting the hand that feeds you, but it's similar.

"Readers want to read about superheroes."

MAGGIE: I would add two other changes. There were comics collectors before, but any sort of organized comics fandom began for all intents and purposes in 1960. Since then, two things have happened. There's been a change in the public perception of the hobby, from "Gosh, you read comics?" to "Gee, I understand they're worth a lot of money." So that's one thing — the outside perception of the hobby. The other is the influence that fans now wield on the professionals. When comics fandom began, quite literally fans weren't even aware who the professionals were. There was so much unsigned work. **Carl Barks'** name was unknown, because that was company policy at Western. Nowadays, the fans can make or break a comic — where, before, they were a fractional percentage of the sales. The direct-sales market is in part responsible for this, but they sort of feed each other — comics fans have an influence they never had before.

BILL: *Well, when you started out as a fan, Maggie, women must have been even scarcer in fandom than they are today.*

MAGGIE: Oh, yes! The first major comics convention was held in New York City, put on by a fan named **John Benson** —

DON: He's still around, he publishes SQUA TRONT.

MAGGIE: — and the number of women who attended was minimal...mostly the wives of other fans. **Lee Hoffman** was there. She's a science-fiction and western writer who grew up reading comics. I was there. **Pat Lupoff** was there. One or two others — a secretary at Marvel, whose name I've forgotten.

DON: Flo Steinberg.

MAGGIE: Right. And that was about it. **Paul Krassner,** editor of THE REALIST,

Cover (by Maggie) of the first issue of COMIC ART, the first general-interest comics fanzine. Spring '61 (75 copies).

asked me why so few women read comics and so forth, and I said, "Damned if I know."

DON: With her usual insight. *(Laughter.)*

MAGGIE: Of course, in the Forties, little girls read comics just as much as little boys did — in fact, we devoted an entire portion of COMICS COLLECTOR #7 to women in comics — where we addressed that question in depth. There are a lot of reasons, such as fewer and fewer comics being produced that interest females. My mother's theory — I think it's probably the most correct on a pragmatic level — is that as the Fifties really took hold, two forces militated against girls continuing to read comics. One was that boys had more of an acceptable range of what they could spend their allowances on, while girls were expected to provide their own make-up and, frequently, their own clothes. Therefore, girls had less disposable income to spend on their reading material. Second, as comics became less widely available, they left a lot of newsstands, and there were no socially acceptable places for girls to hang around and browse through comics.

BILL: *Don, do you have any comments to add?*

DON: I wouldn't presume to argue with a woman on how women feel and what women's experiences were. *(Laughter.)*

LOU: *Getting back to your current positions, editing COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE and the COMICS COLLECTOR magazine for Krause — how did COMICS COLLECTOR come about?*

DON: It had nothing to do with us. Independent of buying BUYER'S GUIDE — and independent of hiring us — Krause had decided to bring out a publication about comic books. We did not edit the first issue, although we were working here by that time. We did do some advising, and corrected some of the more egregious errors, but had no responsibility for the first issue.

MAGGIE: It's like when we started COMIC ART. Independently and simultaneously, there were other publications springing up, but we had no connection with them and knew nothing about then. So, professionally, history was repeating what had happened, fannishly, 20 years earlier.

DON: After sales came in on the first issue of COMICS COLLECTOR, it was decided to continue publication — but the company wanted it done in-house. It had been edited by some people in Connecticut. This is not too efficient, to have the editorial staff in Connecticut and the publication office in Wisconsin. We got word of our new status while we were in New York at the Forbidden Planet Convention. **Chet Krause** and **Doug Watson**, our publisher, bought us a couple drinks and told us we were going to be editing COMICS COLLECTORS starting with the next issue.

LOU: *That's a nice way to do it.*

DON: So I promptly had a heart attack! *(Laughter.)* Actually, I had been feeling pretty bad for about a week and was, I found out later, having a week-long heart attack at the time. So our first issue of COMICS COLLECTOR — as well as our regular weekly issues of BUYER'S GUIDE and biweekly issues of MOVIE COLLECTOR — were suddenly dumped entirely on Maggie, while I was in the hospital and then recovering at home.

LOU: *How did you manage, Maggie?*

MAGGIE: This is an incredibly supportive

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"With BUYER'S GUIDE if an issue

company. Everybody sticks together, and so the editors of the other Krause publications — the auto magazines and coin magazines — said, "if there's anything we can do, let us know." There wasn't much. In order to physically lay out and edit the copy — you have to physically lay out and edit the copy! They didn't know what an important comics story would be, for example —

DON: Any more than the average comics fan would have any idea about what an important numismatic or auto story would be. As soon as I recovered a bit, we hired **Kim Metzger** as our assistant, and he helped us catch up on all the stuff that had piled up.

MAGGIE: Then, just about the time we were starting to get things worked out, Don went in for a treadmill test, which he flunked, so they promptly popped him back in the hospital and said he need a triple coronary by-pass operation!

DON: I was in the hospital about a week and a half, and at home for four days, and then I started back at work on a half-day schedule for about a week — after that, I was back full time.

LOU: *You mean you had coronary by-pass surgery and they only gave you a week-and-a-half off?*

MAGGIE: No, the company said, "Stay home and don't work," but Don — the pain in the ass! — wouldn't stay home! *(Laughter.)*

DON: It was boring, sitting at home staring at the walls.

MAGGIE: As a matter of fact, the company continually says, "Wouldn't you like to have the afternoon off — or take a break?" but we're really enjoying this. You have to understand that we're doing what we've always wanted to do.

DON: And we're doing it together, which is really great. We get to spend more time together than we'd been able to in the previous 22 years we were married.

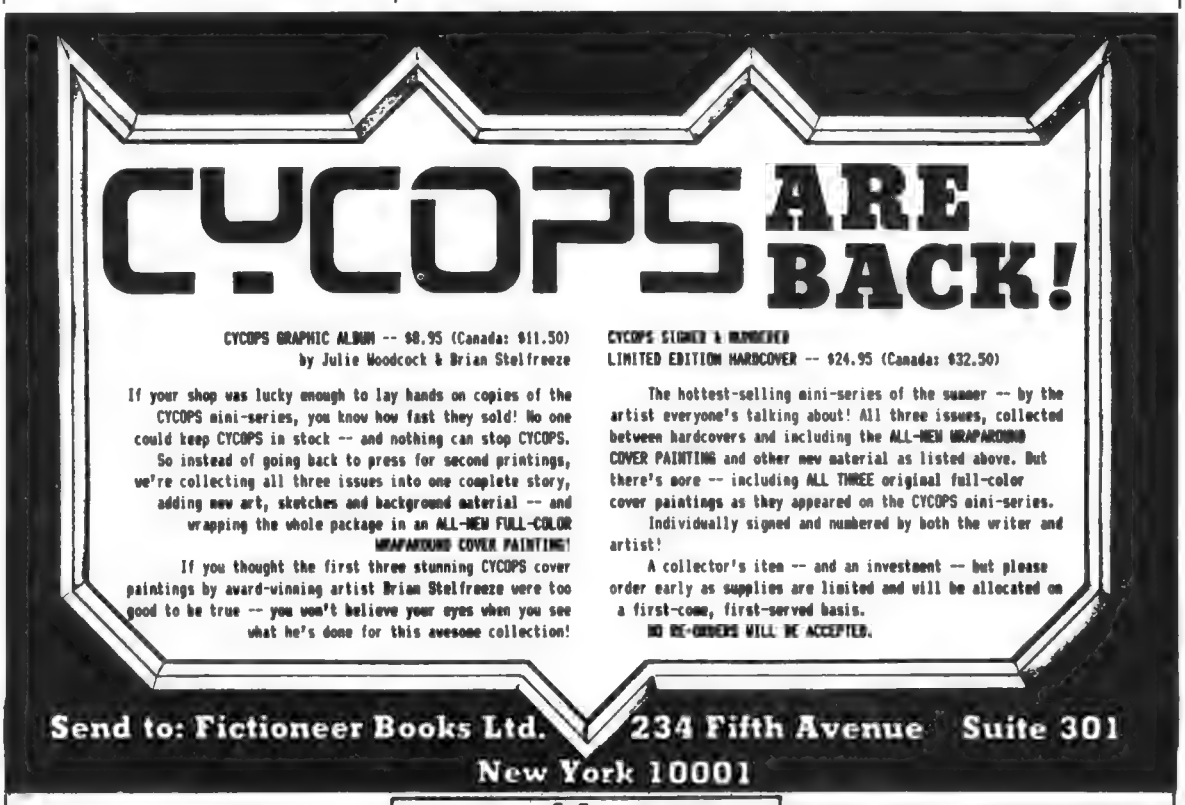
LOU: *What approach are you taking — what audience are you aiming COMICS COLLECTOR at?*

MAGGIE: It's intended for the general reader, as well as the intense hobbyist — the guy who will go for months without sandwiches in order to buy an expensive back issue. We also want to reach the guy who remembers comics from when he was young. We're trying to have articles on each of several topics. We even have articles on comic strips — although you must realize that the comic-strip crowd is a very limited audience, indeed. As opposed to comic books, which are widely available, comic strips are not so widely available, and I think that's a darn shame. Things are better than they used to be, in the sense that we're getting some real historical comic-strip reprints, and even some good public-at-large reprints.

DON: Complete reprints.

MAGGIE: The GARFIELD books are trailblazers, and I wish more publishers would realize that one reason — not the only reason — that the GARFIELD books are so successful is that they don't leave anything out. If you want the complete GARFIELD, you can get it in book form. Every other comic-strip collection for the public-at-large omits some strips.

DON: Even the most popular comic strip in the world — PEANUTS — has strips that get left out of the collections. One of the recent PEANUTS collections, KISS HER, YOU BLOCKHEAD, is almost complete for the period it covers — except that it leaves out eleven strips, for no particular reason. And this is the world's most popular comic strip! Two thousand newspapers, 25 TV specials, four full-length movies, God knows how many items in merchandising — and yet there isn't even a complete collection of PEANUTS. This whole attitude is ridiculous. Can you imagine doing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doesn't interest you, another will."

a complete collection of **Hemingway** and leaving out a couple stories because, what the heck, nobody will notice?

MAGGIE: So in each issue of COMICS COLLECTOR we try to have something on comic strips, something on current comic books, something on Golden Age comics, something on collecting and so forth — to lead the general audience into more complicated areas.

DON: Even though we've gone from a quarterly to a bi-monthly schedule, the problem is that you've got a magazine that comes out only once every couple months. With BUYER'S GUIDE, we can put out an issue that doesn't interest you, that deals with subjects you don't particularly care about, and there'll be another issue the next week that you will be interested in, so no harm is done. But with a bi-monthly magazine — you've got to appeal to everybody.

MAGGIE: Not only that, but the mail response to issue #1 was virtually unanimous — the readers want to read about current superheroes, things that they're already reading. The fact that **Cat Yronwode** did a fantastic article on the **Caniff** school didn't impress these readers at all. Maybe two people picked that article as their favorite. Well, I thought it was dynamite.

DON: In our estimation that was, by miles and miles, the best article in the issue.

BILL: *Many readers of COMICS COLLECTOR have probably never even heard of Milton Caniff.*

DON: True. Someone may even love comic strips, but the only ones he's familiar with are probably those his local paper carries. If the paper doesn't carry STEVE CANYON and hasn't for 20 years, he won't even know the strip exists. And this is a major strip I'm talking about!

MAGGIE: This is what we're saying about comic strips and their lack of familiarity. If your local paper doesn't carry a strip, you don't even know it exists. There's a marvelous strip, called RUDY, by **William Overgard,** which is absolutely delightful. Each character has its own speech pattern. It's a funny strip — weird. It's about a talking monkey, and it's great. But you've never seen it, and it's not doing well, because it's so strange. It will probably fold before long. And you'd never even know it existed, because it's in so few papers.

DON: We made a real effort three or four years ago to look at every comic strip syndicated in this country. We got hold of editors' and publishers' syndicated lists and checked all this stuff. We saw about 95%, but there was about 5% that we could never find.

LOU: *Speaking of percentages, what's happened with the COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE since Krause took over publication and you two have been editing it?*

DON: Sales are up. What's the percentage on that, Maggie?

MAGGIE: Let me give you the actual figures. We're talking paid circulation, because that's the only figure that means a darn thing. Alan used to say his readership was over 10,000, but he was figuring pass-alongs. When Krause bought BUYER'S GUIDE, the paid circulation was 6,743 — that was Alan's last issue. Now, by our most recent statement, it is 10,282.

DON: And it has been going up pretty steadily every week. By going around to conventions and handing it out this summer, we introduced it to some people who had never seen it before.

LOU: *One of your editorials discussed the need for CBG to be distributed through comics shops —*

DON: We're still not getting into all the shops.

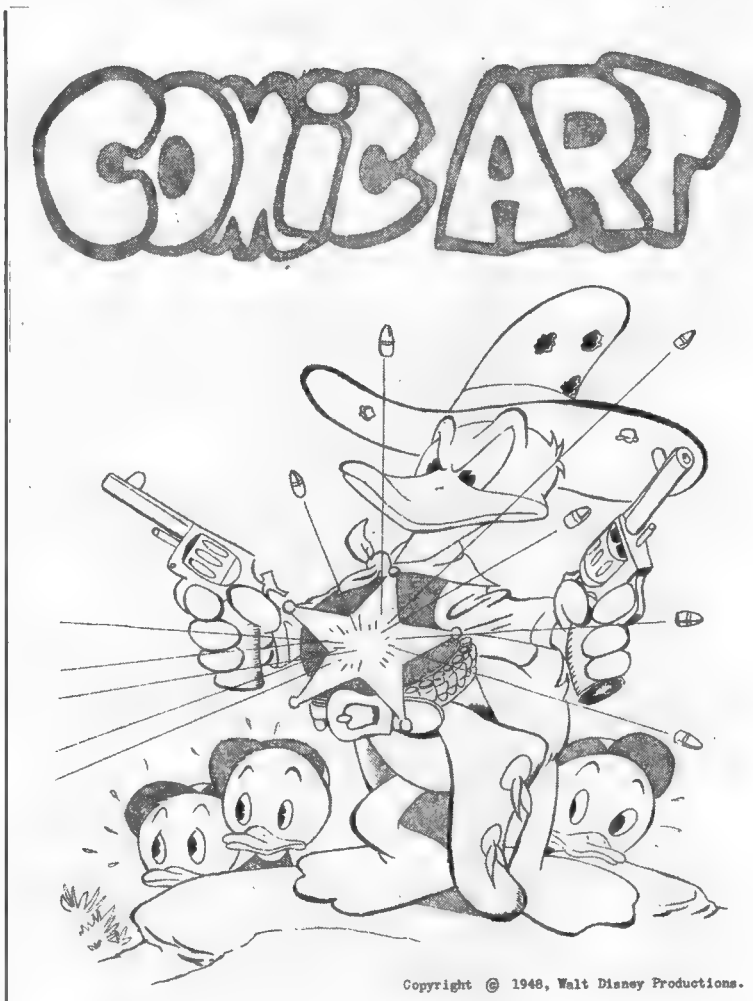
MAGGIE: They've just put the finishing touches on our bulk program, which started with a distribution of almost five hundred — issues, not shops. We will be available on a returnable basis. The program has just begun, and our bulk circulation is steadily increasing.

BILL: *Don and Maggie, if the two of you were in a position of, say, Top High Advisors to both Dick Giordano and Jim Shooter —*

DON: You mean, we're not? *(Laughter.)*

BILL: *— what would you say to them?*

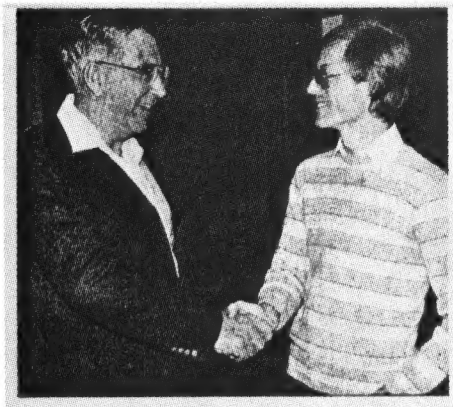
DON: Well, I would certainly suggest that they use the graphic novels not as methods of introducing another new series or putting yet another X-MEN book on the stands that month — but to try some new material from entirely different fields. For example, do a



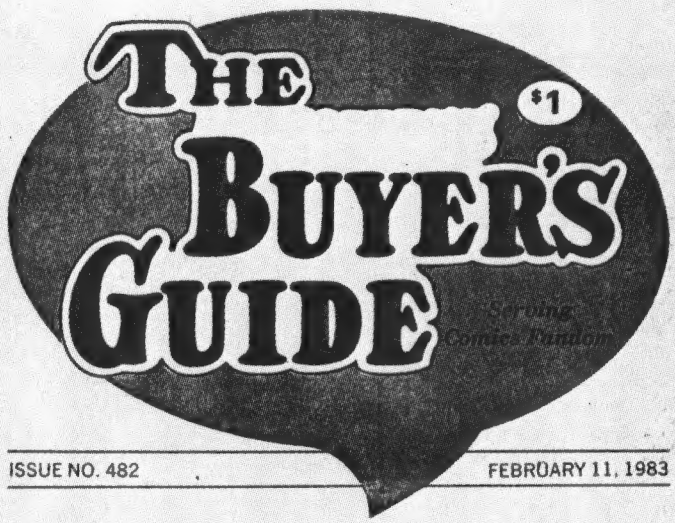
COMIC ART 7 (October 1968). The last issue to date – but the first fanzine with such coverage of Carl Barks.

"I dislike when a writer's run out of ideas."

1983 Krause Publications



A handshake closes the deal transferring ownership of **The Buyer's Guide for Comic Fandom** *and* **Film Collector's World** *to Chet Krause (left) from Alan L. Light. Light started* **Buyer's Guide** *12 years ago, putting his first issues together in his parents' living room. Krause began his publishing career 30 years ago, laying out the first issue of* **Numismatic News** *on his kitchen table. Both saw their creations grow considerably over the years, until* **Buyer's Guide** *became too large for Light's basically one-man operation and more suitable to Krause's modern plant, which publishes books and periodicals for collectors in many fields of interest.*



From the front page of Don & Maggie's first issue as editors of THE COMICS BUYER'S GUIDE.

a complete collection of **Hemingway** and western. Get something like **Doug Wildey's** RIO, which ran in ECLIPSE MONTHLY, and collect it into a graphic novel. I think a trade paperback, a realistic graphic novel western, could tap into the market that's enjoyed by **Louis L'Amour**, for example. And might get rid of the notion that there isn't any market for western comics. The graphic novels should be aimed more at people who don't read comics. I would also suggest that they periodically review their titles and see if their artists are getting tired, see if they couldn't shake 'em up a bit. If someone is grinding out the same plot month after month for one character, switch him over to another.

MAGGIE: Something I'd like to see the industry do to legitimize the comics field is for all the companies — independents and the two biggies — to get together on a Best Of The Year anthology —

DON: Oh, yes.

MAGGIE: — which would be in a large trade paperback format. Each company has some version of the "best" of its own stuff, but the public-at-large doesn't see those. Getting a Best Of The Year anthology in bookstores is something the producers of all the comics could accomplish. I think it could only increase comic-book readership.

DON: I'd volunteer to edit it.

MAGGIE: Me, too! *(Laughter.)*

DON: We're outside the industry, so we'd be fine, impartial judges.

LOU: *There're a couple more questions I want to get in here.*

MAGGIE: Sure, go ahead.

LOU: *You've been heading the CBG editorial staff for — what is it — a couple years, now?*

DON: Since January of 1983.

LOU: *Who's responsible for the difference between the old look and the new look — the switch to typesetting and so forth?*

DON: Well, all of Krause's publications are typeset, and they all look good. They don't want to put out a publication they're ashamed of. But beyond the fact that it's typeset and that it's tabloid — which they stuck with — it's pretty much our doing. The logo for page one was designed by **Doug Watson**, and other than that, everything we've done has been our decision, as far as I can recall.

MAGGIE: What people sometimes don't realize about BUYER'S GUIDE is that, because it's typeset, you get incredibly more material per page than in the old BUYER'S GUIDE. When we did our column in TBG in the old days, we typed it ourselves and it was reduced — but not by a lot. The number of words on a page was few compared to what we get now. Our ratio of editorial to advertising material has stayed identical with Alan's, and continues to average out to 75% ads to 25% editorial.

LOU: *One of the differences between the old and the new BUYER'S GUIDE is that you have many more columnists now.*

DON: The readers really enjoy our columnists. We tried to keep the old ones, of course — and we've introduced several new ones.

MAGGIE: We didn't kick anyone out. We tried to keep everyone. Any who didn't come with us, it was their decision.

DON: We seemed for a while to have lost **Fred Hembeck**, which we felt bad about, but all his time was spent turning out stuff for Marvel. He's back now.

LOU: *Well, that's where Fred got his start, in the old BUYER'S GUIDE — that's where everyone started reading him.*

MAGGIE: There are other people starting now who are rapidly going to go off and become incredible successes whom we can gloat about, too.

DON: Most popular is **Elizabeth Slaughter,** followed by **Bob Ingersoll**, followed by my comics reviews, followed by **Cat Yronwode**. A lot of people also enjoy **Tony Isabella's** openings and closings on what is otherwise a straight news column — "I Cover the Newsstands." On cartoonists, we get a good response to **Fred Hembeck** and **Brian Pearce,** and of course "Everett True" is extremely popular.

LOU: *What's the reaction of the comics companies to CBG?*

DON: You have to ask them — we're not very good at reading minds — but from what they tell us, they read CBG very thoroughly and carefully. They seem to be aware that we are pro-comics, we're not out to "get" anyone, and we do our darnedest to disseminate the news fairly. If we've got a complaint or correction, we run the correction the same place we ran the story. We don't run a story on page one and then bury the correction back in the classifieds.

LOU: *I've noticed that. Another thing I've noticed is that you've taken harder editorial stands on various subjects than the old BUYER'S GUIDE. What kind of reactions have you gotten?*

DON: Well, what we hope from our editori-

"We're not out to 'get' anyone."

als is not that our solitary opinion will change anything, but that if we express an opinion, people will write in and argue for or against it, and give the industry an idea of how the majority of people feel. We prefer to take an editorial stand for something and generate some support for it. We get a lot of thanks from people who tried a comic they might not otherwise have tried, because we reviewed and recommended it.

LOU: *I've noticed that the debate in your columns doesn't descend to the backbiting and in-fighting, usually, that I see in other comics-oriented publications.*

BILL: *Now's your chance!*(Laughter.) *What are you currently pleased about in comics — and what really irks you about comics today?*

DON: I'm enormously pleased with the recent resurgence of funny comic books. I've just been doing a batch of reviews and it seems like one out of every five comics that came out this month is basically humorous — BLUE DEVIL, STIG'S INFERNO, NORMALMAN, CEREBUS, and several others. I've also been impressed with **Alan Moore's** SWAMP THING. It is some of the almost evocative writing, with one of the freshest looks at a long-established character, that I've ever seen. What I dislike about comics is when a writer's been on a book for years, has long since run out of ideas, and is just going through the motions.

MAGGIE: My views tend to be Don's views, in this case, because I get the cream of the crop without looking at the rest of the comics. If Don comes across something that's enormously amusing or exciting, he says, "You've got to read this," and I do. But if he's bored or irritated by something, I don't see it, unless it's supreme idiocy — like a recent sequence in which a character successfully flushed a revolver, or was it —

DON: It was a .45 automatic.

MAGGIE: — down the toilet.

DON: What annoys me is that here's a writer who's too lazy to give something five seconds' thought. Anyone who stops to think about it is gonna realize it's something that can't be done!

MAGGIE: Trends on the good side are aiming comics at the younger readers, which is exciting, and the continued development of the independent market, which is equally exciting. Those are both things that could — potentially — give a much-needed variety to what has become a not-very-varied artform.

DON: Let me just say that I do applaud what I see as an increasing tendency among writers and artists to give some thought to how superheroes really would react and would be regarded, if there were such a thing in the real world. Sometimes it doesn't work out too well, but at least they're looking at it.

MAGGIE: There's also a commendable playing with potential, as in GRIMJACK — sort of an attitude of "How can we play with what has existed as an artform for quite a long time. Is there anything fresh we can do with it?" Crossovers that never would have been possible a few years ago have been attempted through the ingenuity of some authors.

BILL: *Such as — ?*

MAGGIE: The "Munden's Bar" sequences. We've also had a crossover in JOURNEY that was extremely strange.

DON: Normalman crossing over into JOURNEY.

LOU: *In closing, what's in the future of CBG?*

DON: It will always be evolving, but the changes won't be as dramatic as when we first took over.

MAGGIE: Every time anyone makes a complaint or a suggestion, it's discussed here, although the final fruits may not appear for a year! When we first did CBG, it was in two sections, and no one like that. We worked and worked and worked, and we got it into one section, which solved that problem. People still had a wistful longing for the camera-ready ads that **Alan Light** used to run, so we came up with a way to maintain the camera-ready copy without having it hurt the other contents.

LOU: *You mean, the "Comics Trader" section?*

MAGGIE: Right. So if people make suggestions, we work on them.

DON: No suggestion is ignored. At the very least, Maggie and I talk it over. If it's a larger thing, we talk with **Doug Watson** or **Chet Krause** about it.

MAGGIE: People had this image that Krause is this corporate super-structure, transplanted from Madison Avenue —

DON: "Madison Avenue" was the term often applied.

LOU: *With Morgan Edge at the head of it.*

MAGGIE: Exactly! We had a party for comics professionals who live in Wisconsin during the summer —

DON: — and for some fans. This was Chet's idea, and he followed up by saying, "How about if we have a barbeque and I make the hamburgers?"

MAGGIE: He did, too.

DON: Afterwards, he sat around chatting about publishing with **Denis Kitchen**. It's that sort of atmosphere. Iola, Wisconsin, has a population of just over 1000. We love it. The nearest traffic light is thirteen miles away.

MAGGIE: It's the kind of a town where our daughter is a waitress in the restaurant and knows most of the policemen and most of the people in the county and says hello to them on the way to school.

LOU: *So after more than 20 years in fandom, what comics-oriented project that you've been involved with has given you the most pleasure?*

DON: I really enjoyed doing the books with **Dick Lupoff**, but I enjoy what I'm doing now more than anything else I've ever done.

LOU: *How about you, Maggie?*

MAGGIE: I'd have to say the same thing. It's a dream come true. You hear the cliche from various people — but this is exactly what I want to do!

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